

ROBERT OWEN

Social Idealist

BY

ROWLAND HILL HARVEY

Edited, with a Foreword, by

JOHN WALTON CAUGHEY

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FOREWORD

THE CASUAL students in his classes knew Rowland Hill Harvey as a sincere scholar, an inveterate reader, a veritable fountain of information and ideas, and, withal, a bluff, hearty, down-to-earth person.

For twenty years, at the University of California at Los Angeles, successive generations of students flocked to his courses. Whether the announced theme was English history, United States history, or economic history, they were alternately surprised at the depth of his erudition and at the homely illustrations that he liked to draw from daily life.

Many of these students followed him to his office, and often to his home, to pursue in further conversation some of the vistas that his lectures had opened. These young people, and many of his colleagues, too, quickly discovered his warm interest in individual man as well as in mankind in the abstract and in history.

Not all historians allow their researches to reflect their own dominant characteristics. It occasionally happens that a mild and peaceful soul devotes himself to the study of Indian wars, a land-locked researcher to the feats of maritime exploration, or a scholar with great dullness of pen to the life and works of a master stylist. In happy contrast, the research career that Harvey charted for himself appears to have been altogether appropriate to his parts.

His major projects were three in number: a biography, *Samuel Gompers: Champion of the Toiling Masses*, published by Stanford University Press in 1935; the life of Owen here presented; and a study of the Federation of Western Miners, which was about half completed at the time of his death. The obvious thread that unites them is that of the workingman and the problems of his betterment. That this theme was of more than academic interest to him is suggested by his engagement in social work near Hull House in Chicago and subsequently in Los Angeles. In more fundamental fashion it harmonized with his conviction that every human being is entitled to full opportunity to make the most of his talents and his capacities, tempered, however, by the necessity in our society of consonance with the welfare of the group. This was the philosophy he lived by. An enthusiasm for it shows through in certain passages of this book.

Were the author alive, he would, I am sure, express thanks to various persons and institutions for assistance in the preparation of this work. Grants in aid of his researches were advanced by the University of California and by the Social Science Research Council, though it was largely on his own that he went to Manchester, New Lanark, New Harmony, and the other scenes of Owen's career. Librarians and other custodians of knowledge, both in this country and abroad, lent their customary generous assistance. Other associates helped and doubtless would have been thanked expressly. To those who had a part, these words will serve as a token.

My role in connection with this book has been chiefly mechanical. Shortly after Harvey's death in 1943, his widow, Claire, asked me to take charge of placement of the manuscript and of seeing it through the press, which of course I was glad to do. In so far as possible, my aim has been to carry out what I took to be the author's intentions. There may well be passages which he would have improved in proof. The ideas and the story, at any rate, are as he presented them, and my task was merely the routine of supervising their conversion into print.

JOHN WALTON CAUGHEY

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CHAPTER I

OUT OF WALES

NEWTOWN, WALES, is a market town lying along the wooded banks of the upper Severn Valley. At the close of the eighteenth century it was a quiet little place of one thousand inhabitants living in houses built of great oaken beams hewn of the timber taken from the wooded hills near by. A single business street ran the length of the town, and in a little house on this street Robert Owen was born, May 14, 1771.

The modern Newtown has grown to a community of about seven thousand persons, many of them engaged in the weaving of flannel goods. But, as in the days when Owen was a boy, the farmers drive their sheep and cattle through the main street on market days. The house where Owen was born has been torn down to make way for a bank, but a room has been set aside as a museum in his memory. Next door is the Bear's Head Inn where Owen died. It has been rebuilt since then, but it still offers food and shelter to the traveler.

The parish church where Owen worshiped as a child has fallen in ruins, but the tower is being restored. In the yard, close to the crumbling wall of the church, is the tomb of the Welsh reformer.

Little significance may be attached to the early environment of Owen but much to the fact that he was launched into the world at a most momentous era in the long history of England. During Owen's childhood, men tilled the soil, spun, and wove as their forefathers had done. But in England forces were already at work destined to break the crust of the old order and remold it nearer to the pattern of our own civilization.

Only the desire to find some clue that might help to explain the mystery of Owen's life leads us to linger over his early years. Unfortunately, the only record of his childhood is that left by Owen himself. And, although Owen stands out as the very soul of honor, he could never be regarded as detached when writing or speaking of his own life. Like most great reformers, he possessed little sense of humor. Therefore, his record of the early years of his life must be taken with many reservations.

He tells us in his autobiography that his father was an iron-monger and saddler and that his mother came of farmer stock. According to Owen, his father was the leading man of his parish and well versed in its finances and business affairs. Robert was the second youngest of a family of seven children. His parents were poor and his opportunities slight. However, he did attend a school in Newtown kept by a Mr Thickness, where he learned to read and write. Owen declares in his autobiography that he was a most enthusiastic pupil:

In schools in these small towns it was considered a good education if one could read fluently, write a legible hand and understand the first rules of arithmetic. And this I have reason to believe was the extent of Mr. Thickness's qualification for a schoolmaster, because when I had acquired these small rudiments of learning at the age of seven, he applied to my father for permission that I should become his assistant and "usher," as from that time I was called while I remained in school. And thenceforth my schooling was to be repaid by my ushership. As I remained at school two years longer, those two years were lost to me, except that I thus early acquired the habit of teaching others what I knew.

But at this period I was fond of and had a strong passion for reading everything which fell in my way. As I was known to and knew every family in the town, I had the libraries of the clergyman, physician, and lawyer,—the learned men of the town—thrown open to me, with permission to take home any volume which I liked, and I made full use of the liberty given to me.

Among the books which I selected at this period were Robinson Crusoe, Philip Quarle, Pilgrim's Progress, Paradise Lost, Harvey's Meditations among the Tombs, Young's Night Thoughts, Richardson's and all other standard novels. I believed every word of them to be true, and was therefore deeply interested; and I generally finished a volume daily. Then I read Cook's and the circumnavigators' voyages,—the history of the world,—Rollin's ancient history,—and all the lives I could meet with of the philosophers and great men.¹

This appears like a pretty strong diet for a boy of eight or nine years of age. It places him in the same class with Macaulay and Mill. It will be recalled that Macaulay wrote a *Compendium of Universal History* before he was eight years old and that John Stuart Mill had read a staggering list of Greek, Latin, and English works at the same age. But Owen at no time in his life showed any literary ability, nor did his speeches and writings indicate that he had ever read much. Perhaps his very lack of bookishness gave him the supreme confidence in his schemes of reform that carried him

¹ Robert Owen, *Life of Robert Owen*, I, 3. Hereafter this work will be cited as Robert Owen, *Life*.

far. In any case, it is very possible that he handled the books he mentioned as having read and that in his old age, looking back over the events of his childhood, he dramatized them to fit the rest of his career.

Owen attached much importance to the following incident of his childhood. One morning, being in a very great hurry, he hastily swallowed a quantity of hot breakfast food called flummery. The result was that he fainted. For a long time his parents gave him up for dead. When he recovered, he was left with a tender stomach that had to be nursed with exceeding care. Owen thought it gave him the habit of close observation and continual reflection, because he was compelled to study the effects of certain foods on his stomach.

It is significant that Owen seemed to be much given to fainting. In his autobiography he gives two other instances when he fainted, in neither of which does the cause seem sufficient. In persons of genius, fainting seems to be very common. In Owen's case it could not have been due to lack of vitality, for he was robust enough to leave home at the age of ten, and at no time in his long life does it appear that he was unable to work.

Owen would have us believe that he early speculated on the truthfulness of different religious sects:

At this period, probably when I was between eight and nine years of age, three maiden ladies became intimate in our family, and they were Methodists. They took a great fancy to me, and gave me many of their books to read. As I was religiously inclined, they were very desirous to convert me to their peculiar faith. I read and studied the books they gave me with great attention; but as I read religious works of all parties, I became surprised, first at the opposition between the different sects of Christians, afterwards at the deadly hatred between the Jews, Christians, Mohomedans, Hindoos, Chinese, &c., &c., and between these and what they called Pagans and Infidels. The study of these contending faiths, and their deadly hatred to each other, began to create doubts in my mind respecting the truth of any one of these divisions. While studying and thinking with great earnestness upon these subjects, I wrote three sermons, and I was called the little parson. These sermons I kept until I met with Sterne's works, in which I found among his sermons three so much like them in idea and turn of mind, that it occurred to me as I read them that I should be considered a plagiarist, and without thought, as I could not bear any such suspicion, I hastily threw them into the fire; which I often after regretted, as I should like to know now how I then thought and expressed myself on such subjects.

But certain it is that my reading religious works, combined with my other readings, compelled me to feel strongly at ten years of age that there must be

something fundamentally wrong in all religions, as they had been taught up to that period.²

It seems almost incredible that a child of eight or nine years could have been capable of reaching skeptical conclusions on religious matters. Here it is again obvious that Owen has not succeeded in giving an objective treatment of his early life. But perhaps this is expecting too much. It would be presuming enough on our belief in his precocity as a child to have him reading and writing sermons.

There is one comforting element in running through Owen's autobiography with all the rosy pictures that he draws of a child who grew up overnight; and it is that we know more of Owen, the man, who wrote of himself in this vein. Not only did he have little sense of humor, but his respect for downright facts was slight. However, we are unquestionably dealing with a man of genius. Maturity came early; at the age of twenty he was manager of a mill.

Owen's childhood was indeed brief. A few years of racing over the green hills of Wales with boys of his own age, an ever so short acquaintance with school, and then at ten years of age he was packed off to the great city—to London.

My father took me to Welshpool, [Owen wrote], and thence I went to take coach for London at Shrewsbury, which was then the nearest place to Newtown to which there was any public conveyance to go to London. The coach left Shrewsbury at night, and an outside place had been taken for me, with the expectation that I might travel inside during the night. The proprietor, who knew my family, was going to put me inside, when some ill-tempered man, who had discovered that I had paid only for an outside place, refused to allow me to enter. It was dark, and I could not see the objector, nor discover how crowded the coach might be;—for coaches then carried six inside. I was glad afterwards that I did not know who this man was . . .³

And so the little boy with the long nose rode through the chilly night to London Town. Wrapped up in his greatcoat, he sometimes fell asleep as the big coach rumbled over the countryside. His little round head would then sink deeper and deeper into his coat collar; but when an inn was reached, he would sit bolt upright and take in every corner of the scene. Burly porters, swaying lanterns, steaming horses, and bristling passengers, all milled before him. The little Welsh boy of ten was learning the ways of the world outside of Newtown.

² Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

Robert went to stay with his brother in London, but only until he had secured a position as an apprentice to James McGuffog, who kept a shop for the sale of fine fabrics in Stamford. He was to serve without pay for one year; the second year he was to receive £8 and the third year £10. According to custom, he was to be given board and lodging in his master's house.

Robert's life at McGuffog's seemed to have been very happy. The proprietor was an honest Scotchman who took a fatherly interest in the boy. Being an excellent man of business, he gave Owen a good grounding in solid business principles. It was probably during this time that Owen actually came to be a skeptic in religion:

I was all this time endeavouring to find out *the true religion*, and was greatly puzzled for some time by finding all of every sect over the world, of which I read, or of which I heard from the pulpits, claim each for themselves to be in possession of *the true religion*. I studied, and studied, and carefully compared one with another, for I was very religiously inclined, and desired most anxiously to be in the right way. But the more I heard, read, and reflected, the more I became dissatisfied with Christian, Jew, Mohomedan, Hindoo, Chinese, and Pagan. I began seriously to study the foundation of all of them, and to ascertain on what principle they were based. Before my investigations were concluded, I was satisfied that one and all had emanated from the same source, and their varieties from the same false imaginations of our early ancestors; imaginations formed when men were ignorant of their own nature, were devoid of experience, and were governed by their random conjectures, which were almost always, at first, like their notions of the fixedness of the earth, far from the earth.⁴

Owen passed through this religious crisis when he was about fourteen or fifteen years old; henceforth, he was an unbeliever. But before this had happened, he, the serious one, had been much impressed with the godlessness that prevailed in his neighborhood. Therefore, he wrote a letter to William Pitt, the prime minister, asking that the government take steps for a better observance of the Sabbath.

Great was his delight when a short time later the government issued a proclamation calling for the more strict keeping of the Sabbath.

After a comparatively short stay with the McGuffogs, Owen, on the recommendation of his master, obtained a position with Flint and Palmer in London. Probably the boy had advanced with Mc-

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

Guffog to the point where the latter felt he could in justice no longer keep him. In his new situation he acted as an assistant, receiving a salary of £25 a year. Owen wrote thus of his work :

... to the assistants in the busy establishment the duties were very onerous. They were up and had breakfasted and were dressed to receive customers in the shop at eight o'clock;—and dressing then was no slight affair. Boy as I was then, I had to wait my turn for the hairdresser to powder and pomatum and curl my hair, for I had two large curls on each side, and a stiff pigtail, and until all this was very nicely and systematically done, no one could think of appearing before a customer. Between eight and nine the shop began to fill with purchasers, and their number increased until it was crowded to excess, although a large apartment, and this continued until late in the evening; usually until ten, or half-past ten, during all the spring months. Dinner and tea were hastily taken,—two or three, sometimes only one, escaping at a time to take what he or she could the most easily swallow, and returning to take the places of others who were serving. The only regular meals at this season were our breakfasts, except on Sundays, on which days a good dinner was always provided, and was much enjoyed. But when the purchasers left at ten or half-past ten, before the shop could be quite clear a new part of the business was to be commenced. The articles dealt in a haberdashery were innumerable, and these when exposed to the customers were tossed and tumbled and unfolded in the utmost confusion and disorder, and there was no time or space to put anything right and in order during the day. This was a work to be performed with closed doors after the customers had been shut out at eleven o'clock; and it was often two o'clock in the morning before the goods in the shop had been put in order and replaced to be ready for the next day's similar proceedings. Frequently at two o'clock in the morning, after being actively engaged on foot all day from eight o'clock in the morning, I have scarcely been able with the aid of the bannisters to go up stairs to bed. And then I had but five hours for sleep⁵

Owen stayed on in spite of the hard work. However, after the busy season was over, life took on an easier character. There was a chance to make friends and to enjoy walks and talks. But he had already asked his friend, Mr. Neptinstall of Ludgate Hill, to find a new job for him.

In due course a position opened up with a Mr. Satterfield at Manchester, and thither Owen journeyed. This was the most momentous step of his life. He was moving on to the center of a stage where a drama of magnificent proportions was about to be performed, and Owen himself was destined to play a stellar part in it. England was undergoing a revolution more profound than any that has ever shaken a people. The old mold of industrial society was broken, and a new mold based on machine production was taking its place.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

Into this new world stepped Owen—fresh, eager, unhistorical, and without traditions. Keen and clear-headed, he saved money, saw opportunities, and took advantage of them. In an incredibly short time, he had formed a partnership with a man named Jones for the manufacture of Crompton's mules—machines for spinning cotton. This adventure in manufacturing was a short-lived one, but it netted Owen three of the machines and some other equipment. With these he started a spinning establishment of his own. He hired a building, employed three men to work the machines, and at the age of nineteen had become a cotton spinner on his way to a fortune.

While directing this enterprise, he learned that a Mr. Drinkwater, a rich cotton spinner, needed a manager for his mill. Without delay Owen marched off to apply for the job. After being shown into Drinkwater's office, Owen asked him for the position. Drinkwater looked up at the young man with almost a start of surprise. He had expected to see a man of mature years applying for this job. But instead there stood before him a boyish-looking figure with a certain diffidence of manner evidenced by little movements of his hands and legs. Drinkwater started the dialogue:

"You are too young."

"That was an objection made to me four or five years ago, but I did not expect it would be made to me now."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty in May this year."

"How often do you get drunk in the week?"

"I was never drunk in my life."

"What salary do you ask?"

"Three hundred a year."

"What? Three hundred a year! I have had this morning I know not how many seeking the situation, and I do not think that all their askings together would amount to what you require."

"I cannot be governed by what others ask, and I cannot take less. I am now making that sum by my own business."

"Can you prove that to me?"

"Yes, I will show you the business and my books."

Owen then led Drinkwater off to his factory and convinced him that he had not been merely boasting. The result was that Owen obtained a contract with Drinkwater on his own terms and started

^o *Ibid*, 27.

out on his career as a great cotton spinner. So outstanding was Owen's success in managing Drinkwater's mill that in a short time his employer offered him a partnership. Owen accepted this new proposition, but shortly thereafter Drinkwater regretted the new agreement with his manager. A proposal of marriage was made to Drinkwater's daughter by Samuel Oldknow, a rich muslin manufacturer, and with the proposal came a business offer from Oldknow. He suggested that his prospective father-in-law and himself enter into partnership. However, Owen's agreement with Drinkwater stood in the way.

In a dramatic scene between young Owen and Drinkwater after the latter had asked Owen for his terms to end the partnership, the proud young man, seeing that he was in the way, drew the articles of partnership from his pocket and tossed them into the open fire. He then resigned his position, much to the embarrassment of his employer, who begged him to stay on until he could secure another man. Owen tells us that he did stay for a time, but in 1794 he joined two other firms in establishing a new company known as the Chorlton Twist Company.

As it turned out, Drinkwater sacrificed Owen in vain, for his daughter never married the rich Samuel Oldknow. It appears that he was not as rich as Drinkwater had been led to believe; and that, coupled with the unwillingness of the young lady, was enough to bar the match.

The Manchester days were instructive ones for Owen. Not only did he learn the cotton spinning business, but he also came to know something of the world of science and literature through his association with the members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the faculty of Manchester College. Owen was invited to become a member of the Philosophical Society, where he took part in their discussions.

Owen came to know John Dalton, the famous chemist, who was teaching under Dr. Baines in the Unitarian College at Manchester. Owen, Dalton, and Winstanley, another instructor, formed a little group that met frequently to talk religion, morals, and science. Coleridge also joined the party and held forth with great eloquence.

When Owen was not meeting with his friends of the college, he was participating in the discussions of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. The records of that society show that Owen

read at least four papers, none of which was published, however. With the exception of one on the cotton trade, they were on social subjects, and, to judge from the titles, they were indicative of Owen's trend of thought. "An Essay on the Utility of Learning" was read in 1793; in 1795, he came out with "Thoughts on the Connection between Universal Happiness and Practical Mechanics"; and finally in 1797 he read a paper with the following formidable title: "On the Origin of Opinions with a View to the Improvement of the Social Virtues."

All these papers were no doubt decidedly juvenile in character, but they give grounds for belief that Owen had at this time been thinking on social and educational questions and forming opinions that afterwards would be expressed in his work at New Lanark.

Young Owen gave genuine evidence of his interest in science by aiding Robert Fulton. Fulton came to live at Number 8 Brazen Nose Street, Manchester, where Owen was boarding. According to Owen, the two men soon became friends. Fulton was working on an invention for dredging canals and a machine for transferring boats from lower to higher levels in canals without the use of locks. As might be expected, Fulton needed money to further these enterprises, and Owen, struck by the enthusiasm of the young engineer, lent him small sums from time to time until the debt ran up to about £170. Fulton offered Owen a partnership in his schemes, and papers were drawn up and duly signed. But later, the partnership was dissolved by mutual consent with the loans made to Fulton standing as a debt due Owen.

Fulton wrote many letters to Owen explaining his prospects and at the same time his inability to repay the loan. Finally, he did return £60; but shortly thereafter he went to America to win fame with his "Clermont," and Owen heard of him no more.⁷

Owen seemed to have been far too busy spinning cotton and wrestling with scientific and social questions to fall in love. Yet he had his opportunities. In his *Life* he gives an account of a beautiful young woman who passed his way. Owen was diffident and shy during the Manchester days. Therefore, when this young woman, rich and socially desirable, came with her aunt to visit the

⁷ See Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen*, I, 58.

⁸ See Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 64-70.

garden connected with Chorlton Hall, where he was living, he showed them about in the most business-like way. Owen wrote years later :

I was too timid and bashful to enter into conversation with them and too unsuspecting to imagine any other object than the one mentioned,—and with the utmost simplicity and deference allowed them to depart as they came, and certainly much disappointed with the result of their visit to one so stupid as I must have appeared, for there was not the slightest indication of gallantry in anything I said or did. In fact, to imagine any other object in their visit, except to see the garden, never for a moment occurred to me. I learned, too late afterwards, that this young lady had been favorably impressed with my character, and that she had for some time preferred me to all the many suitors who were anxious to obtain her hand. I never knew or suspected these feelings in my favour, not even after this visit to me ; and so backward was I at this period, that I did not consider I was entitled by it to an introduction to her or her family. That connexion, which I might have obtained had I then possessed sufficient knowledge of the world and sufficient self-confidence to have sought it, would have been well adapted to have met and satisfied all the feelings of my nature. But it was not to be,—circumstances were opposed to it, and another destiny was awaiting me.⁹

While connected with the Chorlton Twist Company, Owen's business dealings took him to Glasgow, where he met Caroline Dale, daughter of David Dale. Dale was proprietor of the cotton mills at New Lanark and a Scotchman of rigorously orthodox ideas. Therefore, when he learned that young Owen, fresh from England and tainted with atheistic notions, was frequently in the company of his daughter, he had a plain talk with her and made it clear that Owen was not his ideal of a son-in-law. But Caroline and Robert had other ideas and persisted in meeting. Then too, after a time David Dale's opposition softened. If Owen's religious ideas were bad, his business ability was excellent and his integrity of character still higher.

Owen's opportunity came when Caroline told him that her father wanted to sell the great mill at New Lanark. Though but twenty-eight years of age, Owen arose at once to the occasion. He straightway called on the father and offered himself as the purchaser. His boldness and confidence somewhat flabbergasted Dale, for he looked upon Owen as a mere boy. But Owen hastened to explain that he had the backing of men of wealth. In the end Dale sold his mill for £60,000, payable at the rate of £3,000 a year for twenty years. This

⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

price was fixed by Owen himself, who was entirely trusted by Dale in the transaction.¹⁰

Young Owen, having won over the father, now found no obstacle to his union with Caroline Dale. The couple were accordingly married in Dale's house in Glasgow; and immediately thereafter they journeyed to Manchester, where Owen continued his duties with the Chorlton Twist Company. But after a few months, his partners called him to take charge of the mill at New Lanark. This momentous event for Owen took place in 1800. He was now transferred to a stage where his performance was destined to grip the attention of the whole world.

But before the story is told of Owen's work at New Lanark, it becomes necessary to picture the England that unfolded before his eyes.

¹⁰ See *Ibid.*, 53.

CHAPTER II

OWEN'S ENGLAND

OWEN MOVED in the midst of bewildering change. Yesterday on some green and wooded bank, an angler might have fished for wary trout; on the morrow workmen might lay the foundations for a mill, where whining machinery would break the quietness of the gentle lapping water. The England of green meadows and quiet villages gave way to a new England of mighty cities belching forth smoke from countless factories—humming, roaring factories, whose spindles and looms made cloth to cover the naked of the earth. Where once the village forge glowed while the blacksmith shaped tools for the neighborhood, now stood great smelting furnaces vomiting up flame by day and by night so that the earth might be ribbed in steel.

Englishmen, descendants of Saxon peasants—boar-hunting, fox-hunting Englishmen, beef-eating Englishmen, whose whole background smelled of the soil—found themselves dragged on, pushed on, by the irresistible forces released during this age of the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution was more than the coming of machines driven by steam. It was more than a rapid spread of factories pouring out goods in an ever-increasing volume. It was also a revolution changing the thoughts and practices of men. Laws adapted to an agricultural economy became obsolete. Long established employee-employer relationships based on the small shop ceased to function; the old personal tie gave way to an impersonal one. The new captains of industry, removed from their employees, were little concerned with their comfort and well-being. Regard for profits and more profits occupied their waking thoughts. A newly rich class sprang up; and, after their kind, they behaved in ways unbelievably calloused.

Not only did the Industrial Revolution produce profound changes of thought, but it was itself borne along on the waves of new ideas—new ideas arising out of the stimulus provided by a new world commerce. And England, standing out in the Atlantic facing the New World, rose magnificently to meet the opportunity of new markets.

The great changes were on in Owen's day. Each new machine coming into use threw out of balance the old order and required new adjustments. Improvements in spinning made necessary developments of new sources of power: water and steam. The new power, steam, called for the development of new processes in iron and steel making, and these new processes in turn compelled the improvement of transport. In a sense, the Revolution was a struggle on the part of men to bring about order in an industrial society made chaotic by technical changes in a few industries, such as textiles and iron. It was this very chaos that moved Owen to action. The remedies he came to advocate were based on a belief that the irrational world in which he lived could be made rational and that order would replace chaos.

When Owen went to New Lanark, the manufacture of cotton goods was taking on vast proportions. Indeed, England was to effect her greatest conquest in the realm of cotton. It seems strange to discover that when calicoes and other cotton goods first made their way to England from India they were looked upon as dangerous invaders. The woolen interests dominating Parliament secured legislation hostile to the new products. But such is the nature of the economic life that laws to discourage the natural flow of trade and commerce often prove futile. Soon Englishmen were seizing the initiative from the Hindu and spinning and weaving even finer fabrics. The story of the early Industrial Revolution in England was primarily the story of the enthronement of cotton as king. Though cotton may be spoken of as king in the American South, the very seat of his empire lay in England. The figures in regard to the production of cotton tell the story. They tell the story of the advance of Negro slavery in America and child slavery in England.

In 1790 the value of raw cotton employed in England was £30,000,000. In 1801 the figures leaped to £50,000,000; and by 1810, £123,701,826. The total value of woven fabrics advanced from £5,407,000 in 1800 to £18,426,000 in 1809, and in 1815 the figure rose to £21,480,792. By such a great wave of cotton manufacture the woolen interests were engulfed.

With the world market open to England and little or no competition in sight, the cotton business offered golden opportunities to the manufacturer of England. It was small wonder that the protests of workingmen at the advance of machinery and the cries

of the reformers should be drowned out by a great chorus of approval from eager stockholders. Of course it must not be assumed that these figures altogether tell the story. During the Napoleonic Wars, English goods for a time suffered partial exclusion from the continental market. Also, there was a postwar depression to be considered. But taken all in all, the figures were onward and upward with no serious competition for a long time.

It was all too well known that England's preëminence in cotton manufacture was gained at a heavy price. However, it was to be expected that in the early days of such a business, and in fact in the whole realm of industry, little attention should be paid to the human side of it. We shudder today when we read the facts and figures relative to the employment of children in the mills. In 1816, forty-one Scottish mills employed 3,146 males and 6,854 females. Of these, 4,581 were children below the age of eighteen.¹ The situation in England was no better. Everywhere the children were trooping to the factories.

The evidence given by Owen and others before the select committee of 1816 discloses the evils of child labor in the cotton mills. Long hours were the rule, even up to sixteen hours a day. Owen himself admitted working children of ten years of age over ten and three quarters hours a day exclusive of time taken for meals. In fact, Owen declared to the committee that before Sir Robert Peel presented his bill, the bill being considered in 1816, employers in the Lancashire district were employing more than 5,000 children under ten years of age.²

To a person living in the twentieth century, though perhaps hardened by merciless bombings of children in war, the evidence given before the committee of 1816 is indeed appalling. The spectacle of children five or six years old kept at tasks for as long as thirteen hours a day makes us wonder what kind of men these were who lived in the age of the Industrial Revolution. What were the extenuating circumstances that drove them to such courses—to thus cheat children of their play time?

It might be urged that the work in the cotton mills was light in the sense that it involved no muscular strain, and the idea of chil-

¹ See Élie Halévy, *A History of the English People in 1815*, I, 245.

² See "Report of Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Select Committee on the State of the Children Employed in the Manufactories of the United Kingdom, 25 April-18 June, 1816." *Sessional Papers*, XVI, 86.

dren needing play was a notion foreign to most persons of that day. At one stage in Owen's evidence before the committee, a member raised this question: "What employment could be found for the children of the poor, in those situations, till ten years of age?" Owen was quick with an answer: "It does not appear to me that it is necessary for children to be employed, under ten years of age, in any regular work."³

Serving as an apprentice at an early age was regarded as part of the education of every child of the "lower orders." Therefore, a hundred years ago child labor was taken as a matter of course by parents. The hand-weavers worked their children long hours at their looms, and other industries carried on in the homes made use of children in the same way.

One investigator has this to say on the subject of child labor and the Industrial Revolution:

The evils and horrors of the industrial revolution are often vaguely ascribed to the "transition stage" brought about by the development of machinery and the consequent "upheaval." But the more we look into the matter, the more convinced we become that the factory system and machinery merely took what they found, and that the lines on which the industrial revolution actually worked itself out cannot be explained by the progress of material civilisation alone; rather, the disregard of child-life, the greed of child-labour, and the mal-administration of the poor law had, during the eighteenth century, and probably much further back still, been preparing the human material that was to be so mercilessly exploited.⁴

No matter how we may seek to explain away the evil of child labor during this age of growing mechanization, the great blot will not wash out. Not even after Englishmen could hear the tramp-tramp of little children's feet marching to the mills before dawn did Parliament end the tragedy. It took, as Spencer Walpole wrote, twenty-five years of legislation to restrict a child of nine to a sixty-nine-hour week, and that only in the cotton mills.⁵

If Owen had never done anything else for the forgotten people of England, his work on behalf of the factory acts would give him a high place among the humanitarians. But the story of that great work belongs in another place.

The England of Owen's day was more than an England of machinery, of the poor and illiterate. It was a country with an

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴ B. L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, p. 13.

⁵ See Spencer Walpole, *History of England from 1815*, III, 418.

established church whose prerogatives and respectability were unquestioned. The clergy of the Church of England was quick to resist any encroachments upon what it regarded as its domain. Education and marriage fell within that domain. Whenever the proposition of making education secular came before Parliament, archbishops and bishops rose in the Lords to protest. They could always raise the cry of "the church in danger"; and Englishmen, with their love of the traditional and the stately forms of the Anglican Church, were ready to spring to its defense.

England at this stage did not know popular education. Thousands upon thousands could neither read nor write. But in Scotland, Calvinistic Scotland, elementary education was not so neglected. Indeed, the system there might well have been copied by England. By a law of 1696, amended in 1803, there was provided a schoolmaster for every parish and supported by the parish. He was appointed by the local landowners and ministers, and naturally the Bible and catechism were made the foundation of the teaching. While it was not a system of free education, it did provide that pauper children were to be educated at the expense of the parish. Thus in Scotland education was not compulsory, but it was universal.

England possessed nothing equal to the Scottish system. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, there was no national system of education. The educational advantages that existed were offered either by the Church of England or by some other religious body. Only a pitifully small number had an opportunity to read and write, while the great army of illiterate children remained behind.

Henry Brougham, Lord Chancellor, speaking in the House of Lords in 1835 on the "Education of the People," disclosed some devastating figures taken from the Report of the Education Committee of the House of Commons in 1818. There were in England and Wales 18,500 day schools, endowed and unendowed, educating six days a week 644,000 children. Of this number, 166,000 were educated at endowed schools and 478,000 at unendowed schools—schools supported entirely by voluntary contributions and by the payments received from scholars.* These figures indicate that the

* See Henry Brougham, "Speech on the Education of the People, Delivered in the House of Lords, May 23, 1835," *Speeches*, III, 221.

great burden of education in that day rested on the backs of the unendowed schools.

The committee's report in 1818 revealed that only one in seventeen in the eastern portion of London received any education at all; in the southwestern part of the city, one in twenty-one; in the city of Manchester, one in twenty-seven; one in thirty-five in Birmingham; and one in forty-one in Leeds. Finally it was shown that two-thirds of the "humbler classes" were wholly without education.

The cause of popular education was blighted for a long time by the element of religious controversy that entered into it. The Church of England and the Dissenters both fought for control of education, while children remained ignorant. Only a few, such as Owen, dared suggest the complete secularization of education.

The upper classes thought of education for the "lower orders" as a means of inculcating sound religious principles that would make them amenable and contented with their lot. It was, furthermore, not regarded as an obligation on the part of the state to maintain schools for the education of the masses at public expense.

As an example of the resistance offered to any measure providing for popular education, Samuel Whitbread's Parochial Schools Bill of 1807 is instructive. The bill as originally introduced required that parochial vestries must levy taxes to support schools for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. The element of compulsion was thrown out by the Commons, while the Lords rejected the bill entirely, because it did not give to the minister of the parish enough control over the school.

When the bill was before the Commons, several members arose and declared that it might be well to teach children to read, but writing and too much education would give the poor notions of rising above their station in life. One member (Rose) argued that those who had learned to write well "were not willing to abide at the plough, but looked to a situation in some counting house."

The struggle for control of education centered around Lancaster and Bell. Lancaster, a Quaker, drew around him the Dissenters. They formed a society for the promotion of education entitled the British and Foreign School Society. The Church of

⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, edited by William Cobbett, Vol. IX, ser. 1, pp. 798-800. House of Commons, session of Monday, July 13, 1807.

England group clustered around Bell and launched "The National Society for promoting the education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church throughout England and Wales." Out of the struggle for control of education came more schools, but the surface of ignorance was scarcely scratched in Britain. Owen was unable to break down the wall of religious prejudice and make the education of the poor something more than teaching the catechism, but he at least stormed the outer works.

Owen not only found the Church in opposition to his liberal views on education but also to his far from orthodox ideas on marriage and divorce. Indeed, he found the Church in almost full possession of these important keys to the happiness or misery of men. It was not until 1836 that marriage became a civil contract. And many a year was to pass before divorce came within the range of possibility for a man or woman even in comfortable circumstances.

But it must not be thought that Englishmen willed to have education secular or at that time looked with favor upon marriage apart from the Church. Therefore, when Owen struck at these time-honored forms of respectability, he met with such opposition as to destroy his influence with the masses of the English people.

While Owen wrestled with the problem of the poor and lowly at New Lanark, the ruling classes in England were enforcing a penal code as ferocious as any in all history. No less than two hundred offenses called for the death penalty. The hungry, driven to desperation, poached on game preserves of the rich. The rich retaliated with laws providing for imprisonment with hard labor for taking game; and then, when poachers resisted the gamekeepers in armed gangs, a law was passed in 1803 making death the penalty for even the threat of resistance in arms.

In spite of the protests of Romilly and Mackintosh, the privileged classes, professing to see in the desperate acts of the poor the menace of revolution, passed ever yet new laws calling for the blood of the poor. Sheep stealing, or stealing linen from a bleaching ground, and other acts of theft provided the penalty of death on the gallows. Scores of offenses that today might be treated as misdemeanors called for transportation to Botany Bay for a term

of years or even life. The only saving grace in this savage example of man's cruelty to man is to be found in the action of juries. They simply refused to convict in many cases where the punishments were out of all proportion to the offenses.

Not only did the ruling class protect its game preserves by savage laws, but it prevented all organized protest on the part of the workers by the Combination Acts of 1799. Under these acts employees were forbidden to combine in associations to raise wages or shorten hours. These laws, so manifestly unfair to labor, remained in force until that redoubtable tailor, Francis Place, engineered their repeal in 1824.

And so it came about in England that there were "two nations," even as Disraeli declared—the rich and the poor.

While the rich grew richer, the poor grew poorer. The machine poured out a great abundance of goods; agricultural science made possible ever increasingly larger crops; but the poor grew steadily hungrier and hungrier. Such was the paradox that confronted "Mr. Owen of New Lanark."

The ruling class—the rate-paying class—found the swelling army of poor a great burden. "What is to be done with the poor?" That came to be the question of the day. For pauper children, the answer was easy: apprentice them to the lords of the cotton mills. The adults were not so easily disposed of. They ate more and were less amenable to discipline; but the overseers of the poor sometimes drove them off in gangs to work in the fields and roads. It was indeed an evil day for those who had once been cottagers with a few acres and a loom to find themselves reduced to servitude.

While the eighteenth century had ushered in an age of reason and skepticism, Owen's England was a believing England. The scientific and inquiring spirit so characteristic of the nineteenth century had not yet penetrated the thick crust of a society still medieval in outlook. Darwin and Huxley had not yet arrived upon the scene, but their advent was not far distant. Thus Owen lived in an England much out of joint, with a thousand and one abuses, political, religious, economic, and social, that cried out for reform. But for a long time the ruling class, entrenched in an unrepresentative Parliament, did nothing but protect its interests. Owen was made of different stuff. With everlasting enthusiasm, he struck out in all directions to remold England nearer to his ideal.

CHAPTER III

THE POWER OF CIRCUMSTANCE

O WEN AND HIS young bride returned to Glasgow on January 1, 1800. It was a remarkable day for Owen. Henceforth he was to be lord and master over a great manufacturing plant and rule a town of two thousand inhabitants. It was a difficult task for him, because they regarded him with suspicion as a designing Englishman intending to exploit them to the limit. David Dale, the former owner, was well known to them as a man of benevolent impulses and one of their own people. Over and against the inhabitants of the mill town stood his partners, men who were dividend minded and unsentimental. Owen's interest at this time was only one-ninth of the total.

The people of the little town were dirty, drunken, and depraved, as might be expected of mill hands of that day. Owen wrote in his *Life* that theft was very common and drunkenness the favorite recourse. Perhaps a life as dull and drab as theirs left no other means of escape.

The town was beautifully located, however, on the green banks of the Clyde, which curved into a crescent at this point. Above the town were the "Falls of the Clyde," a stretch of the river where the water poured over the rocks in a succession of cascades. But this beauty, apparently, had little effect upon the people, who spent most of their lives within the ugly gray walls of the mill or in their own dirty shacks.

In his *Life*, Owen leads us to believe that he started out with a plan for the redemption of the people. It seems more probable that as he worked to eliminate the grosser abuses, the idea took shape in his mind that he might make the town a model one. He was naturally orderly and tidy and seemed to have a flair for efficiency in production.

In order to increase efficiency within the factory, Owen devised what he called a "Silent Monitor" for each employee. "This consisted of a four-sided piece of wood, about two inches long and one broad, each side coloured—one side black, another blue, the third yellow, and the fourth white, tapered at the top, and finished with wire eyes, to hang upon a block with any side to the front.

One of these was suspended in a conspicuous place near to each of the persons employed, and the colour at the front told the conduct of the individual during the preceding day, to four degrees of comparison. Bad, denoted by black and No. 4—indifferent by blue, and No. 3,—good by yellow, and No. 2,—and excellent by white and No. 1.”¹

Owen found that most of the silent monitors registered black at first; but after he had aroused the workers’ pride, the boards reflected improvement until many showed white as he passed through the mill.

A very considerable portion of the working force of the mill consisted of pauper children. Owen wrote that Dale had engaged between four and five hundred such children from parishes anxious to be rid of them. Their actual ages ranged from five to ten years, but they were given as seven to twelve. Dale had provided for their food and lodging and also for their education; but Owen found that the children learned very little, especially since the meager instruction they received came at the end of a very long day’s work. Indeed, many of them fell asleep over their books.

It seems only too apparent that conditions at New Lanark under Dale’s ownership were no worse and probably much better than in most of the cotton mills in Britain at that time. All evidence points to the benevolent spirit of that proprietor and his well-meaning efforts on behalf of his work people.

Owen was determined to end the pauper labor arrangements, and to attain that goal he made no more engagements with the parishes. He also raised the age for children who were employed in his mills to ten years. But he was not so successful in reducing their hours of labor. For a long time he was compelled to keep the mills running fourteen hours a day with two of these hours allotted for meals. His partners barred his attempts at reform in the length of the work day. But by changing partners, he managed to reduce the actual time of labor of his employees to ten and three-quarters hours a day by 1816.²

Owen’s early efforts at reform in New Lanark were directed at cleaning up the streets and the houses as well as getting rid of

¹ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 80–81.

² See “Report of the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on the State of the Children Employed in the Manufactories of the United Kingdom, 25 April–18 June, 1816,” *Sessional Papers*, XVI, 20.

the shops where liquor was sold. The streets were swept every day at the expense of the company; but the problem of cleaning up the dwellings was not so easy. Robert Dale Owen writes of his father's efforts to bring about this latter reform:

A reform of a more delicate character, upon which my father ventured, met serious opposition. After each family became possessed of adequate accommodations, most of them still maintained, in their interior, disorder and uncleanness. My father's earnest recommendations on the subject passed unheeded. He then called the work-people together, and gave several lectures upon order and cleanliness as among the Christian virtues. His audience heard, applauded, and went home content "to do as weel as their forbears, and not to heed English clavers."

Thereupon my father went a step further. He called a general meeting of the villagers; and, at his suggestion, a committee from among themselves was appointed, whose duty it was to visit each family weekly, and report in writing upon the condition of the house. This, . . . while grumblingly acquiesced in by the men, was received "with a storm of rage and opposition by the women." [Taken from *Robert Owen at New Lanark*, by a former teacher at New Lanark, p. 5.] They had paid their rent, and did no harm to the house; and it was nobody's business but their own whether it was clean or dirty. If they had read Romeo and Juliet, which is not likely, I dare say they would have greeted the intruders as the Nurse did her prying master,—

"Go, you cot-quean, go;

"Get you to bed!"

As it was, while a few, fresh from mop and scrubbing-brush, received the committee civilly, a large majority either locked their doors or met the inquisitors with abuse, calling them "bug-hunters" and other equally flattering names.

My father took it quietly; showed no anger toward the dissenters; encouraged the committee to persevere, but instructed them to ask admittance as a favour only; and allowed the small minority, who had welcomed these domiciliary visits, to have a few plants each from his greenhouse. This gratuity worked wonders; conciliation of manner gradually overcame the first jealousy of intrusion; and a few friendly visits by my mother, quietly paid to those who were especially tidy in their households, still further quelled the opposition. Gradually the weekly reports of the committee became more full and more favorable.³

And so Owen cleaned up their houses, but there was much more to be done. How he handled the liquor problem is best given in his own words:

The retail shops, in all of which spirits were sold, were great nuisances. All the articles sold were bought on credit at high prices, to cover great risks. The qualities were most inferior, and they were retailed out to the

³ Robert Dale Owen, *Threading My Way*, pp. 72-73.

workpeople at extravagant rates. I arranged superior stores and shops, from which to supply every article of food, clothing, etc., which they required. I bought everything with money in the first markets, and contracted for fuel, milk, etc., on a large scale, and had the whole of these articles of the best qualities supplied to the people at the cost price. The result of this change was to save them in their expenses full twenty-five per cent., besides giving them the best qualities in everything, instead of the most inferior articles, with which alone they had previously been supplied.⁴

The prejudice and suspicion of the people seemed to have been very deep-seated, and Owen constantly refers to this attitude in his story of these early years at New Lanark. But his opportunity to win the villagers over came when President Jefferson put through his Embargo Act, closing American ports to the export trade. Straightway American cotton ceased to move to England, and the prices of cotton rose to such heights that many manufacturers in England closed down their plants. Owen tells us that he too stopped his machinery. But he also paid full wages for the time that the embargo was on, amounting to a sum of £7,000 in all. This was a severe strain on his relations with his partners, but it won the complete confidence of his people.⁵

The pace of reform at New Lanark now quickened. Drunkenness and theft practically disappeared; the little slabs of wood recording individual character now showed yellow and white; very young children no longer stood by the spinning machinery watching for a broken thread; the birth rate of illegitimate children dropped. But Owen's partners, good commercial men, became apprehensive.

The master of New Lanark was not all reformer in the years after he took over the establishment. He was also a good husband and a very sympathetic father. Of his family he wrote:

I had one son born in a year after my marriage,—but he died in infancy. Another, named Robert Dale, was born the end of the second year. William Dale, two years afterwards. Then followed two daughters—Anne Caroline, and Jane Dale—about two years between each. Then David Dale, and Richard; and my youngest daughter, Mary, closed the number of my family.⁶

Though Owen was a disbeliever, he apparently did not press his opinions upon his children. Robert Dale wrote of his attempts as a child to convert his father to the Christian faith:

I recollect, to this day, the spot on which I commenced my long-projected undertaking [converting his father]. It was on a path which skirted, on the

⁴ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

farther side, the lawn in front of our house and led to the garden. I could point out the very tree we were passing when—with some misgivings, now that it was to be put to the test—I sounded my father by first asking him what he thought about Jesus Christ. His reply was to the effect that I would do well to heed his teachings, especially those relating to charity and to our loving one another.

This was well enough, as far as it went; but it did not at all satisfy me. So, with some trepidation, I put the question direct, whether my father disbelieved that Christ was the Son of God?

He looked a little surprised and did not answer immediately. "Why do you ask that question, my son?" he said at last.

"Because I am sure—" I began eagerly.

"That he *is* God's Son?" asked my father smiling.

"Yes, I am."

"Did you ever hear of the Mahometans?" said my father, while I had paused to collect my proofs.

I replied that I had heard of such a people who lived somewhere, far off.

"Do you know what their religion is?"

"No."

"They believe that Christ is not the Son of God, but that another person, called Mahomet, was God's chosen prophet."

"Do they not believe the Bible?" asked I, somewhat aghast.

"No. Mahomet wrote a book called the Koran; and Mahometans believe it to be the word of God. That book tells them that God sent Mahomet to preach the gospel to them, and save their souls."

Wonders crowded fast upon me. A rival Bible and a rival Saviour! Could it be? I asked, "Are you *quite* sure this is true, papa?"

"Yes, my dear, I am quite sure."

"But I suppose there are very few Mahometans: not near—*near* so many of them as of Christians."

"Do you call Catholics Christians, Robert?"

"O no, papa. The Pope is Antichrist."

My father smiled. "Then by Christians you mean Protestants? Well, there are many more Mahometans than Protestants in the world: about a hundred and forty million Mahometans, and less than a hundred million Protestants."

"I thought almost everybody believed in Christ, as mamma does."

"There are probably twelve hundred millions of people in the world. So, out of every twelve persons only one is a Protestant. Are you *quite* sure that the one is right and the eleven wrong?"

My creed, based on authority, was toppling. I had no answer ready. During the rest of the walk I remained almost silent, engrossed with new ideas, and replying chiefly in monosyllables when spoken to.

And so ended this notable scheme of mine for my father's conversion.⁷

As the sons grew older, they came more and more under their father's influence. All of them had a leaning toward the scientific,

⁷ Robert Dale Owen, *op. cit.*, 60–61.

and on that account their father's skepticism became increasingly attractive to them.

Their mother, steadfast in her Calvinism, prayed nightly for the conversion of her wrong-headed husband; but it never took place. Indeed, his opposition to revealed religion mounted with the years. But the miracle of love overcame all religious differences.

Caroline Owen's love for her husband needed to be very great; for it was to be sorely tried in the years to come when he was to forsake wife and home in pursuit of his ideal. In those New Lanark days she watched with uneasiness his growing enthusiasm for reform, especially his almost fanatical reiteration of the philosophy that all humanity might be saved by good surroundings and proper environment. Every day she heard him preach this doctrine to the many visitors who called upon them at Braxfield House. Braxfield, located on the Clyde near the mills, came to be their home in those days before Owen started on his travels.

At the mills, on the streets of New Lanark, or at Braxfield, Owen was always the gentle, benevolent-looking gentleman. Wherever he went, children gathered about him to receive his little pats and gentle smiles and sometimes his gifts of sweetmeats.

His son Robert tells of many little incidents relating to his father in the formative years at New Lanark. It appears that Owen would not allow any of his children to be punished for their misdeeds or rewarded for their good acts. In this position he was consistent with the philosophy of determinism that he preached. "The individual is not responsible for his acts; he is entirely a creature of circumstances," he repeated over and over again. When little Robert in a fit of temper screamed in the nursery, his father admonished his nurse and his mother not to touch him. He must not be spanked nor cajoled but left to himself to scream until he became exhausted.

No doubt the patient mother often shook her head sadly at the peculiar ideas of her husband, but he was so mild and even tempered about it all that she could not be offended.

It speaks much for Owen's charity that he should have won the friendship of his father-in-law, a man of strong religious faith. David Dale lived with Owen and was even nursed by his son-in-law, whose lack of faith must have puzzled Dale at times. Over and over again he would declare to Owen after a discussion of religious doc-

trines: "Thou needest to be very right, for thou art very positive."⁸ Each respected and admired the other.

After eight years of preliminary work with his people, Owen stood ready to make some very radical reforms. He had in mind the building of schools for the training of the children. To that end Owen started work on a plant to house the school. But in the midst of this, while the walls were still unfinished, his partners rebelled. Up to this time they had occasionally demurred but nevertheless followed him. They now reminded him that they were in business for profit and not for philanthropy. Owen, however, was resolute and offered to buy them out for £84,000. His partners accepted, and Owen was compelled to find new backing.

Owen's new partners proved even less amenable to his reform schemes for New Lanark. In a very short time, affairs came to a crisis. Owen offered to buy these partners out, but they insisted upon putting up the mills for public auction. The upshot of the business was that Owen resigned the managership of the mills with its salary of one thousand pounds a year. He soon found himself short of cash; for his partners refused to allow him the use of any part of his investment, which turned out to be £70,000.

Resolved now (1813) to hand-pick his partners, Owen posted to London. It must be remembered that he had attained a certain amount of fame as a philanthropic employer by this time. Braxfield House had entertained scores of the great and the near great. And so Owen had little trouble in getting financial support for his plans, though they did not offer to the investor a large return. In fact, Owen thought five per cent ample and did not offer more.

It was a remarkable group of men who came to Owen's aid at this time. Mr. John Walker of Arno's Grove, a cultivated Quaker gentleman who was wealthy enough to buy "the establishment twice over," took three shares of the thirteen Owen proposed to issue in the partnership.⁹ The second member of the projected firm was Joseph Foster, also a Quaker, who took one share. Another share was taken by William Allen, a Quaker of very pious nature and destined to give Owen much trouble. Joseph Fox, a dentist, was also assigned a share, as was Michael Gibbs, who came to be Lord Mayor of London.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹ Owen retained five out of the thirteen shares for himself.

The group was completed by securing the backing of Jeremy Bentham, the philosopher. Owen gives the story of his interview with this eccentric individual :

It was most amusing to me to learn the difficulty, owing to his nervous temperament, that he had in making arrangements for our first interview after I had agreed to accept him as one of our associates in the New Lanark firm. After some preliminary communication with our mutual friend James Mill and Francis Place, his then two chief counsellors, and some correspondence between him and myself, it was at length arrived at that I was to come to his hermit-like retreat at a particular hour, and that I was, upon entering, to proceed up stairs, and we were to meet half way upon the stairs. I pursued these instructions, and he, in great trepidation, met me, and taking my hand, while his whole frame was agitated with the excitement, he hastily said—"Well! well! It is all over. We are introduced. Come into my study!" And when I was fairly in, and he had requested me to be seated, he appeared to be relieved from an arduous and formidable undertaking. He had one share, and his friends have stated that it was the only successful enterprise in which he ever engaged. He, like Mr. Walker, never saw the New Lanark establishment.¹⁰

There is at least one piece of evidence to indicate that Bentham went into the undertaking in spite of one friend's vigorous protests. Sir Samuel Romilly wrote thus to Dumont of Bentham's venture :

Bentham is, I am afraid, about to engage in a speculation respecting the mills at Lanark, in Scotland, which is to have the double object of making the fortunes of those who engage in it, and of extending education and instruction among the lower orders of the people. I endeavoured strongly to dissuade him from it, thinking that, at his time of life and in his situation, it was great folly to embark in any concern which, by possibility, no matter how remote, might involve him in difficulty and in distress, and ultimately in ruin. All my good advice, however, only made him very angry; as if he did not know how to manage his own affairs, as if he wanted advice, or was to be treated like a child, etc., etc. I told him that the man who was engaging him in this, though very well-intentioned, was really a little mad. To which his answer was, "I know that as well as you; but what does that signify? He is not mad *simpliciter*, but only *secundum quid*." Finding nothing was to be done, I took my leave of him, contrived to make him laugh, and put him at last in good humour by telling him that, though he would not take my advice, he might depend upon it that, when he was an uncertified bankrupt, I would not turn my back upon him.¹¹

¹⁰ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 95-96.

¹¹ Sir Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly*, III, 135-137, n.

Years later, after Owen had left the plain of philanthropy and practical reform for the cloudy realms of the "New Jerusalem," Bentham wrote of him :

Robert Owen begins in vapour, and ends in smoke. He is a great braggadoccio. His mind is a maze of confusion, and he avoids coming to particulars. He is always the same—says the same thing over and over again. He built some small houses; and people, who had no houses of their own, went to live in those houses—and he calls that success.¹²

The business had certainly paid well up to this time, that is, if we can take Owen's word for it. He declared that the net profit for the four years ending in 1814, after five per cent had been paid for the money, amounted to £160,000.

William Allen seems to have undergone no little wrestling with the spirit over the Lanark business. It is not always clear whether his uncertainty of mind was due to his concern over the money he was to invest or to Owen's atheism. In his writings, presumably an excerpt from his journal, we find this entry under the date of January 1, 1814 :

Still in suspense about to Lanark, but my mind is tranquil, leaving all in the Lord's hand, with a comfortable hope that if the matter be inconsistent with his will, he will not permit it to take place, and if on the contrary, it is his appointment, that he will support me under it.¹³

At other times there was much more of leaning upon God for support and asking for a sign of His intention. Allen finally went into the business but not before he and his Quaker friends had written into the articles of partnership certain provisions in regard to the education of the children.¹⁴ On these articles Allen wrote :

They provided, by distinct articles, for the religious education of all the children of the labourers employed in the works; and it is expressly stated, "that nothing shall be introduced tending to discourage the Christian religion or undervalue the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

That no books shall be introduced into the library, until they have been approved of, at a general meeting of the partners.

¹² Jeremy Bentham, *Works*, X, 570-571.

¹³ William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, I, 135.

¹⁴ In Owen's account of the sale of the property to himself and his partners, he declares that Allen was present at Glasgow; but Allen writes that he received word of the sale from Fox.

That schools shall be established at New Lanark, in which all the children of the population resident at the partnership establishment there, may be educated on the best models of the British system to which the partners may agree; but no religious instruction, or lessons on religion, shall be used, except the Scriptures, according to the authorized version, or extracts therefrom with out note or comment; and the children shall not be employed in the mills belonging to the partnership, until they shall be of such an age as shall not be prejudicial to their health."¹⁵

The story of the sale of the mills reads like a romance with the villains foiled by the sturdy courage of Owen. On the appointed day his former partners appeared all confident that the property would be theirs; and to celebrate what they believed would be their victory over Owen, they had prepared a feast with the choicest wines on the table. But Owen had other plans. With the stout backing of his wealthy partners, who were kept strategically in the background, he entered the lists against the villains. The bidding started at £60,000. Alexander Macgregor, solicitor for Owen, bid £100 more. The enemy bid £1000 more. Macgregor, according to instructions from Owen, raised the bid another £100. So it went, Macgregor always bidding £100 more than the opposing side.

Owen's former partners continued to lead the bidding until £100,000 had been reached. "But before they had attained this point, their appearance and manner gradually changed. They became pale and agitated, and again retired to consult. Returning to the sale after Mr. Macgregor had bid one hundred upon their advance to one hundred thousand, they again resumed, [Macgregor] bidding one hundred each time, until they bid one hundred and ten thousand one hundred. Their agitation now became excessive. Their lips became blue, and they seemed thoroughly crest-fallen."¹⁶

On went the bidding after the opposition, Owen's former partners, tried to persuade Owen to let the mills go at such a fair price. Finally Macgregor raised their bid of £114,000 his customary £100. At this point the enemy quit, and the mills of New Lanark were knocked down to Robert Owen for £114,100.

It was a triumph for Owen, celebrated by the delighted inhabitants with a great procession. Owen rode at the head of it, his carriage being dragged along through the streets by his devoted subjects amidst the wildest cheering.

¹⁵ William Allen, *op. cit.*, 136.

¹⁶ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 91.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

OWEN'S QUEST for new partners was not the only reason for his trip to London in 1813. For a long time ideas gained from his experiences at New Lanark had been fermenting in his mind. And so he went down to London to publish the manuscripts of his *Essays on the Formation of Character*.

It is small wonder that he should have been thus moved. Already princes and philosophers had found their way to his great experiment. The cynics and skeptics who had come to scoff and doubt departed filled with wonder and praise. Fortified by such success, it is not strange that Owen should have caught the vision of a new heaven and a new earth created on the model of Lanark with some glorious new principles added. What could be done once could be done again, he argued; and also what could be done on a small scale might be applied universally. And so Owen, clad in the bright armor of faith in his principles, marched out to battle a world given over to evil ways.

Before Owen proceeded with the publication of his work, he visited Francis Place, the celebrated tailor of Charing Cross. Place helped him with the manuscript and later wrote of Owen's visits:

He introduced himself to me, and I found him a man of kind manners and good intentions, of an imperturbable temper, and an enthusiastic desire to promote the happiness of mankind. A few interviews made us friends. . . . He told me he possessed the means, and was resolved to produce a great change in the manners and habits of the whole of the people, from the most exalted to the most depressed. He found all our institutions at variance with the welfare and happiness of the people, and had discovered the true means of correcting all those errors which prevented them having the fullest enjoyment possible, and, consequently, of being wise and happy. His project was simple, easy of adoption, and so plainly efficacious, that it must be embraced by every thinking man the moment he was made to understand it. He produced a manuscript, which he requested me to read and correct for him. I went through it carefully, and it was afterwards printed. . . . Mr. Owen then was, and is still, persuaded that he was the first who had ever observed that man was the creature of circumstances. On this supposed discovery he founded his system. Never having read a metaphysical book, nor held a metaphysical

conversation, nor having even heard of the disputes respecting free-will and necessity, he had no clear conception of his subject, and his views were obscure. Yet he had all along been preaching and publishing and projecting and predicting in the fullest conviction that he could command circumstances or create them, and place men above their control when necessary. He never was able to explain these absurd notions, and therefore always required assent to them, telling those who were not willing to take his words on trust that it was their ignorance which prevented them from at once assenting to these self-evident propositions.¹

Owen's message to the irrational world of his day took the form of four *Essays on the Formation of Character*. The first two were published in 1813 under the title of *A New View of Society*; the other two were not published until 1817.² They were indeed the gospel of his new social order, setting forth the principles of his teachings and his method of bringing them into practice.

It was an opportune time for such a message; for all Europe was in the agonies of a struggle against the tyranny of Napoleon. The Great Conqueror, supreme on land, launched the thunderbolts of his Berlin and Milan Decrees against Britain and British goods. And now England entered into a season of suffering. The parish relief lists grew longer and longer. Meantime, Moscow burned; and Napoleon, no longer invincible, fell back to Paris. Spring brought Europe in arms against him. Then came Leipzig and Elba, a brief interval of peace, and the Hundred Days. Britain, triumphant, passed from war to peace—a peace without a parallel in her whole history. The misery of the working classes passed beyond all bounds. Hunger-driven mobs smashed machines, burned barns, and threatened the very existence of government.

In this disturbed time Owen brought forth the essays. The "First Essay" in the initial edition was dedicated by Owen to William Wilberforce. It seemed fitting that he should do so; for, in looking around him, no man seemed to Owen so worthy as Wilberforce. His work in outlawing the slave trade made him rank among the first of the humanitarians of his age. But in the second edition and later editions of the essay, Wilberforce's name does not appear. The high hopes that Owen had in the great reformer had been shattered by the latter's hostility to the Owenite program, especially that part of it that bore on religion.

¹ Graham Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place*, pp. 63-64.

² Later, all the essays were given the title of *A New View of Society*.

When Owen's plan for the relief of the poor came before the House of Commons, Wilberforce voted against referring it to a committee. The following passage in his *Diary* makes his position clear: "I was forced to speak against it on the Christian ground that they would exclude religion from life and substitute knowledge instead."³

The "First Essay" opens up with the famous dictum repeated a thousand times by Owen in the years of his messiahship:

Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means; which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men.⁴

The principle laid down here that environment was the all important factor in the shaping of human character was one that Owen had hammered out of his own experiences at New Lanark. Perhaps Owen thought he was announcing to the world a new idea. However, it mattered little to him whether the idea was new or thousands of years old. He thought it good and sound; and above all, he wanted it put into practice. No argumentation or proof to the contrary was able to swerve him one step from what he believed to be the path to salvation. His was the way of science—the way of all social reform. The nineteenth century would see the flowering of the idea that man is what his environment makes of him.

In the same essay, Owen observed that according to the census figures the poor and working classes of Great Britain and Ireland numbered fifteen million persons, or nearly three-fourths of the total population, living, according to Owen, in conditions "which directly impel them to a course of extreme vice and misery; thus rendering them the worst and most dangerous subjects in the empire; while the far greater part of the remainder of the community are educated upon the most mistaken principles of human nature, such, indeed, as cannot fail to produce a general conduct throughout society, totally unworthy of the character of rational beings."⁵

Owen moved on into the position that society was responsible for the existence of crime—a very modern notion. After visiting

³ William Wilberforce, *Diary*, V, 46.

⁴ Robert Owen, "First Essay," *A New View of Society*, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Newgate prison, he declared that Lord Sidmouth, then Home Secretary, should have been punished rather than a certain boy of sixteen held in the prison heavily ironed for an offense.⁶ Owen certainly was preaching a new doctrine in an age given over to severe punishments as a cure for crime.

Owen found an illustration in the career of Napoleon:

Even the late Ruler of France, [he wrote,] although immediately influenced by the most mistaken principles of ambition, has contributed to this happy result [the removal of ignorance], by shaking to its foundation that mass of superstition and bigotry, which on the continent of Europe had been accumulating for ages, until it had so overpowered and depressed the human intellect, that to attempt improvement without its removal would have been most unavailing. And in the next place, by carrying the mistaken selfish principles in which mankind have been hitherto educated to the extreme in practice, he has rendered their error manifest, and left no doubt of the fallacy of the course whence they originated.⁷

This view of Napoleon and his place in history would certainly meet with the approval of many modern students of that great man, especially that part of Owen's estimate which credits Napoleon for the sweeping away of many outgrown institutions.

Happiness of mankind is the refrain running through the entire essay. Owen everlastingly proclaims that his is the way to attain that goal. Thus the eighteenth-century creed of happiness through the life of reason crops out in every word he writes.

In the "Second Essay," Owen examined particulars. The principles are great, but the practice is greater. Once more he told the story of New Lanark and how the people of that village had been redeemed from vice and misery by the "new system."

There was still more of New Lanark in the "Third Essay." But now Owen added a new and more positive note. Heretofore he had concerned himself with the removal of "bad circumstances" from the inhabitants; but with the opening of the new Institution, Owen's school at New Lanark,⁸ he proposed to build character on a rational pattern. To that end Owen had provided playgrounds for the young children; for he saw very clearly the importance of supervised play in forming good habits. In this feature he was

⁶ See Jonathan Wooler, "Mr Owen's Plan for the Growth of Paupers," *Black Dwarf*, I, 465-475 (August 20, 1817).

⁷ Robert Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸ Institution for the Formation of Character, opened January 1, 1816. See below, pp. 37-41.

decades ahead of his time. He was entirely out of sympathy with the rigorous enforcement of the Sabbath as a day of "gloom and tyranny." It was a day to be used for recreation and enjoyment for those who worked during the week.

Of course he dilated upon the work of the school at New Lanark and boldly attacked what he termed irrational education. He wanted education to be more meaningful, more related to life; and above all, ethical. Children must understand what they read and see the usefulness of what they learned. Religious education involving the teaching of subject matter not squaring with the facts of science and life he wanted kept entirely away from immature minds. Indeed, Owen repeatedly struck at revealed religions.

Some of the high points in his essays indicate that he kept altogether consistent with his first principle. It is obvious that, with the idea that any character can be formed by the proper means, education became the great panacea. He early declared in his essays "that children can be trained to acquire *any language, sentiments, belief, or any bodily habits and manners*, not contrary to human nature."⁹

All the misery in the world, crime and its punishment, wars, and misconduct generally sprang from the failure of the rulers of the earth—the leaders of the people—to recognize the truth of Owen's principle relative to the formation of character. He announced:

Happily for poor traduced and degraded human nature, the principle for which we now contend will speedily divest it of all the ridiculous and absurd mystery with which it has been hitherto enveloped by the ignorance of preceding times and all the complicated and counteracting motives for good conduct, which have been multiplied almost to infinity, will be reduced to one single principle of action, which, by its evident operation and sufficiency, shall render this intricate system unnecessary, and ultimately supersede it in all parts of the earth. That principle is *the happiness of self, clearly understood and uniformly practised; which can only be attained by conduct that must promote the happiness of the community.*"¹⁰

Another principle that followed from the first was "*that the character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him; that it may be, and is, chiefly, created by his predecessors; that they give him, or may give him, his ideas and habits, which are the powers that govern and direct his conduct. Man, therefore, never did, nor is it possible he ever can, form his own character.*"¹¹

⁹ Robert Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹ Robert Owen, "Third Essay," *A New View of Society*, p. 45.

Finally, in his "Fourth Essay," Owen sought to apply his principles to government. Although he never came to associate himself with any particular political party, he kept up throughout his life a steady bombardment of petitions to prime ministers and Parliaments begging the adoption of his views. Owen started off in his final essay with the Benthamite creed that the end of government is to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Accordingly, he called upon government to cease fostering the liquor traffic and to end the legalization of lotteries, thus discouraging gambling among the poor.¹² The national church also came in for Owen's censure. He did not at this stage in his career advocate the abolition of the church; but he demanded that all tests and "declarations of belief" be eliminated, thus making the church truly a national church.¹³

After much rambling about, Owen at length came down to the proposal dearest to his heart—a national system of education for the poor:

Either give the poor a rational and useful training, or mock not their ignorance, their poverty, and their misery, by merely instructing them to be conscious of the extent of the degradation under which they exist. And, therefore, in pity to suffering humanity, either keep the poor, if you now can, in the state of the most abject ignorance, as near as possible to animal life, or at once determine to form them into rational beings, into useful and effective members of the state.¹⁴

To the building of a national system of education Owen saw in the Church of England a formidable enemy. It was seeking at that time to control the government's policy with respect to schools. Owen was vividly aware of this attempt and did not hesitate to turn attention toward it. He was moderate enough at this time, however, to ask that the Church make a sacrifice of its interests in order to build a nonsectarian educational structure for the country.

Owen's advocacy of a national system of nonsectarian education together with a plan for employment agencies and a program of making productive the labor of the idle mark him a forward-looking man. Clearly, he was thinking ahead of his time.

¹² See Robert Owen, "Fourth Essay," *A New View of Society*, p. 66.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

CHAPTER V

THE INSTITUTION FOR THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER

THE STORY of the essays must not obscure the most significant of Owen's activities: his program of education at New Lanark. The year 1814 marked the beginning of a new epoch at the mill town. The commercially minded partners were now gone, and new partners to whom cash was not the all in all called out to Owen, "full speed ahead!" Owen was ready and confident, ever mindful that his success so far at Lanark had proved that man is the creature of circumstance.

Owen had found the people of New Lanark ignorant, drunken, shiftless, and dirty, and now they stood before him clothed in their right minds. The drunken had become sober, the shiftless industrious, and the dirty clean. Despair gave way to hope and joyfulness. Such was living testimony to the truth of his principles. Yet all these miracles were but faint foreshadowings of the mighty transformation that was to be wrought by education.

Like Plato and the makers of dream worlds in the past, Owen saw that an ideal society could be created only by capturing the youth and training it in the way it should go. Thus the education of the children from infancy became his aim. Plato would have turned the parents out into the country away from their children. Owen would have done the same and so also the Soviets after him. The eternal parents perpetuating the prejudices and vices of the race by example to their children stood, according to these teachers, as the great barrier to human progress.

The whole problem of life to Owen was moral and ethical. Education must not only impart useful knowledge but teach moral attitudes. It was more important to Owen that the children be taught to love one another than that they should know how to read and write. What shall it profit a child to know his catechism by heart if the meaning of it remains hidden from him? Why spend months of his time and torment his mind by learning to read by rote passages from the Scripture that even the learned do not understand? These were the challenges that Owen hurled at the

educators of his day. Perhaps much of what he said and did on education showed the unconscious influence of Rousseau. But Owen was no mere echo of other men's ideas. His were born out of his own experiences; he was unhampered by learning and bookishness; he was essentially unhistorical and traditionless. If Owen had been a gentleman's son and had studied at Oxford, history would not have known him.

The unfinished walls of the structure that was to be the Institution for the Formation of Character now began to grow again.¹ Owen's new partners for a time gave him that free hand he had longed for throughout the years. By the close of 1815, the building he had planned for his great experiment in forming character stood ready to receive the children.

It was a large building—two stories high with two rooms on the upper floor. One of these rooms was ninety feet long and forty feet wide; the other was forty-four feet long and the same width as the larger room. The rooms were twenty feet high and very adequately provided with windows. The larger room was designed to be used for a lecture hall. It was fitted with desks and a pulpit at one end. Galleries provided seating for visitors.

The smaller room was also used for lectures and sometimes as a ballroom. It was in this room that the dancing lessons, which so horrified Owen's Quaker partners, were given. The walls were hung with specimens of minerals and representations of animal life. Pictures of huge reptiles and fish arrested the attention of all who entered the room.

The lower floor was divided into three rooms of equal size used as classrooms for the younger pupils.

The best description of the school as a whole is given by Owen's eldest son, Robert Dale Owen, who in all his writings manifests a frankness and cultural spirit that is admirable. He writes of the difficulty in procuring the right kind of teachers and the problem of overcoming the bad influence of the parents when the school had the children in charge but five hours a day. Then he passes down into a discussion of the actual work of the school.²

¹ See the letter of Robert Owen to Henry, Lord Brougham, n.d., in the *New Moral World*, I, 11-13 (November 8, 1834).

² See Robert Dale Owen, "Outline of the System of Education at New-Lanark," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 49-50, 57-58, 65-66, 73-74, 81-83 (Nov. 12, 19, 23, 30; Dec. 7, 1825).

The school was opened to children from eighteen months to twenty years of age. The night school provided education for the older pupils, beginning at ten years of age; for parents were anxious to get their children to earning money as soon as possible, and Owen had fixed ten years as the lowest age for working.

The infant classes, from two to five years, remain in school only one half of the time mentioned as the regular hours of attendance for the other classes. During the remainder of the time, they are allowed to amuse themselves at perfect freedom, in a large paved area in front of the Institution, under the charge of a young woman, who finds less difficulty—and without harshness or punishment—in taking charge of, and rendering contented and happy, one hundred of these little creatures, than most individuals, in a similar situation, experience in conducting a nursery of two or three children.³ By this means, these infants acquire healthful and hardy habits; and are at the same time, trained to associate in a kind and friendly manner with their little companions; thus practically learning the pleasure to be derived from such conduct, in opposition to envious bickerings, or ill-natured disputes.⁴

Because of the outstanding contribution made by Owen to infant education, that part of his work at New Lanark deserves more than passing notice. It seems most appropriate to let Owen speak for himself:

I had before this period acquired the most sincere affections of all the children. I say of all—because every child above one year old was daily sent to the schools. I had also the hearts of all their parents, who were highly delighted with the improved conduct, extraordinary progress, and continually increasing happiness of their children, and with the substantial improvements by which I gradually surrounded them. But the great attraction to myself and the numerous strangers who now continually visited the establishment, was the new infant school; the progress of which from its opening I daily watched and superintended, until I could prepare the mind of the master whom I had selected for this, in my estimation, most important change,—knowing if the foundation was not truly laid, it would be in vain to expect a satisfactory structure.⁵

Owen went on to explain the difficulty in getting a master for the infant school. Finally he found in the town

a poor simple-hearted weaver named James Buchanan, who had been previously trained by his wife to perfect submission to her will, and who could gain but a scanty living by his now oppressed trade of weaving common plain cotton goods by hand. But he loved children strongly by nature, and his patience with them

³ Robert Dale Owen evidently has reference to Molly Young. See p. 39.

⁴ Robert Dale Owen, *loc. cit.*, 57–58 (Nov. 19, 1825).

⁵ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 138.

was inexhaustible. These, with his willingness to be instructed, were the qualities which I required in the master for the first rational infant school that had ever been imagined by any party in any country; for it was the first practical step of a system new to the world. . .⁶

Owen also selected one of his mill hands, Molly Young, a girl of seventeen, to act as a nurse for the children. Then he directed the two on their behavior toward the children :

The first instruction which I gave them was, that they were on no account ever to beat any one of the children, or to threaten them in any manner in word or action, or to use abusive terms, but were always to speak to them with a pleasant countenance, and in a kind manner and tone of voice. That they should tell the infants and children (for they had all from one to six years old under their charge,) that they must on all occasions do all they could to make their playfellows happy,—and that the older ones, from four to six years of age, should take especial care of younger ones, and should assist to teach them to make each other happy.⁷

Owen insisted that the children be not “annoyed with books; but were to be taught the uses and nature or qualities of common things around them, by familiar conversation when the children’s curiosity was excited so as to induce them to ask questions respecting them.”⁸

It is at this point that Owen tears a leaf out of the book of Rousseau. *Emile* must be intrigued into asking questions.

The room used for the instruction of the children “was furnished with paintings, chiefly of animals, with maps, and often supplied with natural objects from the gardens, fields, and woods,—the examination and explanation of which always excited their curiosity and created an animated conversation between children and their instructors, now themselves acquiring new knowledge by attempting to instruct their young friends, as I [Owen] always taught them to think their pupils were, and to treat them as such.”⁹

Owen declared that the children asked questions about the maps hung in the room and made astonishing progress in knowledge without the use of books. This led him to believe that books should not be introduced until the children were ten years old. But it was not easy to carry such an idea into practice; the parents naturally associated education with reading and writing.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Owen laid great emphasis upon teaching the little ones dancing and singing. Military exercises were also introduced. These features always made a good show for the visitors but greatly disturbed Owen's Quaker partners, especially William Allen. The dancing seemed wicked enough to him, but the military exercises were a plain affront to his convictions. Allen was also shocked at the Roman tunics worn by both boys and girls and never rested content until he had put the boys into pantaloons.

It appears that the very young children were also given lessons in geography.

Their lessons in geography were no less amusing to the children themselves and interesting to strangers. At a very early age they were instructed in classes on maps of the four quarters of the world, and after becoming expert in a knowledge of these, all the classes were united in one large class and lecture room, to go through these exercises on a map of the world so large as almost to cover the end of the room. On this map were delineated the usual divisions of the best maps, except there were no names of countries or cities or towns; but for the cities and towns were small but distinct circles to denote their places—the classes united for this purpose generally consisted of about one hundred and fifty, forming as large a circle as could be placed to see the map. A light white wand was provided, sufficiently long to point to the highest part of the map by the youngest child. The lesson commenced by one of the children taking the wand to point with. Then one of them would ask him to point to such a district, place, island, city, or town. This would be done generally many times in succession; but when the holder of the wand was at fault, and could not point to the place asked for, he had to resign the wand to his questioner, who had to go through the same process. This by degrees became most amusing to the children, who soon learned to ask for the least thought-of districts and places, that they might puzzle the holder of the wand, and obtain it from him. This was at once a good lesson for one hundred and fifty,—keeping the attention of all alive during the lesson. The lookers on were as much amused, and many as much instructed, as the children, who thus at an early age became so efficient, that one of our Admirals, who had sailed round the world, said he could not answer many of the questions which some of these children not six years old readily replied to, giving the places most correctly.¹⁰

It is difficult to form any very complete idea of the work done in the infant school. Natural history seems to have been taught; for Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, wrote of the curriculum of the school:

Natural History is taught to all the scholars, even to the youngest, or infant classes; who can understand and become interested in a few simple particulars

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 144.

regarding such domestic animals as come under their own observation, if these are communicated in a sufficiently familiar manner; for this, indeed, is almost the first knowledge which Nature directs an infant to acquire.¹¹

It seems probable that some were taught to read in the infant school John Griscom, an American university professor visiting New Lanark, had this to say on the subject:

One apartment of the school afforded a novel and pleasing spectacle. It consisted of a great number of children, from one to three or four years of age. They are assembled in a large room, under the care of a judicious female, who allows them to amuse themselves with various selected toys, and occasionally collects the oldest into a class, and teaches them their letters.¹²

Owen was very proud of his infant school and jealously guarded his title as the founder of the first school of that kind. On one occasion he wrote a long letter to Lord Brougham correcting the latter, who according to Owen had not recognized Owen's claim. He declared that Brougham, in a statement before the Committee on Education of the House of Commons, took the credit for having established the first infant school in 1818.¹³

Owen had a right to be proud of his work in promoting infant schools. And though the idea appeared in other places, this fact should not detract from his performance. The school was launched by him at New Lanark, because it was altogether consistent with his philosophy of changing the characters of individuals. He observed from actual practice that the sooner he drew the children away from the complete influence of their parents the better for the success of his general plan.

The same philosophy controlled the activities of the school for the older children as was applied to the infant schools. Rewards and punishments, which were then almost universally regarded as necessary accompaniments of education, were altogether barred.

¹¹ Robert Dale Owen, *loc. cit.*, 65-66 (November 23, 1825).

¹² "Selections from *A Year in Europe*," *Reports on European Education*, edited by Edgar W. Knight, pp. 11-111.

¹³ N.d., in *New Moral World*, I, 11-13 (November 8, 1834).

Owen, in his anxiety to establish his claim, evidently misunderstood the remark. For Brougham's actual words before the committee were: "In this country, I think it is now about seventeen years since my Noble friend [Lord Lansdowne] and I, with some others, began the first of these seminaries, borrowing the plan, as well as the teacher, from Mr. Owen's manufactory at Lanark . . ." (Taken from Henry, Lord Brougham, "Speech on the Education of the People, Delivered in the House of Lords, May 23, 1835," *Speeches of Henry, Lord Brougham*, III, 237.)

Because he considered that the children were "creatures of circumstances," he believed that it was illogical that any merit should be attached to good behavior; and, conversely, that bad conduct, being entirely a result of improper environment, could not fittingly carry with it any blame.

According to Robert Dale Owen, natural history, history, geography, reading, writing, and arithmetic, and sewing for the girls, were the subjects taught. Natural history was made as realistic as possible by using drawings and pictures. But there seems to have been more lecturing to the pupils than we would think good practice today.

In the teaching of history, many mechanical aids were used. Robert Dale Owen's account makes this clear:

Ancient or Modern History constitutes another branch of their education. It may be thought, that in teaching History, the aid of sensible signs can be but seldom called in. The reverse, however, is the case. Their application here is, in fact, more complete than in any other branch. Seven large maps or tables, laid out on the principle of the Stream of Time, and which were originally purchased from Miss Whitwell, a lady who formerly conducted a respectable seminary in London—are hung round a spacious room. These, being made of canvass, may be rolled up at pleasure. On the Streams, each of which is differently colored, and represents a nation, are painted the principle events which occur in the history of those nations. Each century is closed by a horizontal line, drawn across the map. By means of these maps, the children are taught the outlines of Ancient and Modern History, with ease to themselves, and without being liable to confound different events, or different nations. On hearing of any two events, for instance, the child has but to recollect the situation, on the table, or the paintings, by which these are represented, in order to be furnished at once with their chronological relation to each other. If the events are contemporary, he will instantly perceive it. When the formation and subdivisions of large empires are represented, the eye seizes the whole at once; for wherever the colored stream of one nation extends over another, on these tables, it is indicative, either of the subjection of one of them, or of their union; and their subsequent separation would be expressed by the two streams diverging again. The children can therefore point out the different historical events, as they do the countries on the map of the world, count the years and countries as they do the degrees of latitude and longitude; and acquire an idea almost as clear and tangible of the history of the world, as that which the first terrestrial globe they may have seen, gave them of its form and divisions. We know, ourselves, how easily we can call to mind any events, representations of which we were, as children, accustomed to see, and we may then estimate the tenacity with which such early impressions are retained.¹⁴

¹⁴ Robert Dale Owen, *loc. cit.*, 65–66 (November 23, 1825).

Though some might object to such a method of teaching history as being too mechanical and unrealistic, it has the merit of being concrete and teachable.

It has already been pointed out that the reading studies were selected under the principle that the children must understand what they read.

A knowledge of reading and writing is considered but as furnishing a child with tools, which may be employed for the most useful or most pernicious purposes, or which may be rusty and unemployed in the possession of him, who having obtained them at a great trouble and expense, is yet unacquainted with their real use. The listlessness and indifference so generally complained of by him, whose unpleasant duty it becomes, to force learned, but to them unmeaning sounds, upon his ill-fated pupils, who are thinking of nothing all the time, but the minute that is to free them from the weary task,—are scarcely known under such a system.¹⁵

There was little else that was unique in Owen's school. Much of the practice in teaching arithmetic and some of the other subjects was shot through with the influence of Pestalozzi, and the whole organization showed marks of Lancaster's monitorial system.

Owen's school astonished and pleased the liberals of his day; but the religious of orthodox mold were loud and persistent in their protests against the infidelity taught. William Allen, Owen's Quaker partner, felt called upon to stop the progress of the wrong opinions taught to the young at New Lanark and often journeyed north to set Owen right. Under the date of August 26, 1814, Allen wrote in his diary :

Spent most of the evening with Owen, at his residence, at Braxfield; he walked about with me, and we had much painful conversation on the subject of his peculiar opinions.¹⁶

And then somewhat later he set down this :

I found the arrangements, with regard to the manufacturing part, excellent, and even beyond my expectations; but alas! Owen, with all his cleverness and benevolence, wants *one thing*, without which, parts and acquirements and benevolence are unavailing.¹⁷

Still later :

Sat down with R. Owen and J. Fox to a most important discussion of several points in the articles of partnership, particularly those relating to the training

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-58 (November 19, 1825).

¹⁶ William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, I, 156.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

of the children, and the use of the Holy Scriptures in the schools. The latter, Fox and I made a *sine qua non*, at least as far as we are concerned, and Owen at length yielded.¹⁸

Again in the spring of 1818, Allen, accompanied by Michael Gibbs and Joseph Foster, gave Owen a very particular visit. Allen's diary entries betray how deeply he was concerned over what he saw :

This has been a trying week, as I have had deep exercise of mind on account of Robert Owen's infidel principles. I have sustained many disputes with him.

We have endeavoured to get pretty full information relative to the state of the concern at Lanark, both with regard to the population and the business. What I pray for is to be favoured to see clearly what is required of me to do. Oh! that He whom I wish to love and to serve, would favour me with light and clearness.¹⁹

Allen was not too high-minded and straightforward in his methods of bringing the gospels to the poor people of Lanark. He wrote under the date of May 7 :

Joseph Foster and I took a walk to Old Lanark, to see the minister there, and inquire into the moral state of the people at the mills; he said he was not aware of any case of drunkenness for a year or two past; and he did not think Owen's principles took any root among the population. We then went to another of their ministers; he gave us a very good account of the morals of the people at the mills, and I find that he visits them often; he seemed heartily glad to hear our sentiments on the subject of the Scriptures, etc.; and we urged him to visit the schools, and see that they were taught there, and also to correspond with us, if he saw any attempt made to introduce any thing contrary to revealed religion.²⁰

Owen was quite aware of the measures taken by Allen to check upon his management of the schools. Years later he wrote of Allen as "a man of great pretensions in his sect, a very busy, bustling, meddling character, making great professions of friendship to me, yet underhandedly doing all in his power to undermine my views and authority in conducting the new forming of the character of the children and the population at New Lanark."²¹

Allen held a meeting of the people in the town. This was done with the approval of Owen. Of course, Allen and the other partners, Foster and Gibbs, made it clear to the townspeople that they were most solicitous of their spiritual welfare. The people re-

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

²¹ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 141.

sponded next morning with an address of appreciation for all that had been done for them at New Lanark.²²

Sometime later Allen and the London partners wrote a long reply to the address, describing what Owen had done as "temporal comfort," and setting forth their interest in "your *eternal* well-being."²³

Owen seemed to have paid little attention to Allen's suggestions for the "*eternal* well-being" of the people; for in 1822 Allen and his two friends, Foster and Gibbs, were back at New Lanark determined upon a complete purge of Owen's educational system.

Allen declared to Owen that they were armed with the authority of the London partners to renovate the schools. He also quoted extracts from the articles of partnership which gave the control of the educational system to the London partners; and, on top of it all, he declared his intention of resigning from the firm if the articles were not carried out. Owen "expressed himself rather warmly, but at length consented that the whole business of education should be managed by them."²⁴

After Allen's crusade, he went back to London and wrote Owen a letter filled with Christian love and charity :

I yesterday received thy reply to my letter announcing our safe return to London; that reply awakened afresh all the sympathy which I have ever felt for the benevolent part of thy character. Sorry am I indeed to see, that our principles are diametrically opposite; but may that Great and Holy Being, who seeth not as man sees, so influence thy heart, before the shadows of the evening close upon thee, that it may become softened, and receive those impressions which He alone can give; then thou wilt perceive that there is indeed something infinitely beyond human reason, and which human reason alone can never comprehend, though, in itself, perfectly reasonable. At Present, however, it is quite plain to me *that we must part*.²⁵

It is apparent that Owen paid little heed to Allen's complaints, because, when the latter visited New Lanark again in 1824, he wrote in his diary : "Want of subordination and proper instruction."²⁶

It was most unfortunate for Owen that his downright honesty made it impossible for him to compromise with the prevalent spirit of religious intolerance. But if he had been more yielding, then he would not have been Owen—the iconoclast. Perhaps Owen saw the

²² See Allen, *op. cit.*, I, 259.

²³ *Ibid.*, 259-264.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 39-40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 141.

value of opposition in making himself a public figure and his cause a popular one. It was no doubt this desire that led him to encourage visitors to New Lanark.

The visitors came by the hundreds. Robert Dale Owen declares that the number of visitors recorded in their "Visitors Book" from 1815 to 1825 was nearly twenty thousand.²⁷ Such a parade of on-lookers might have been desirable in publicizing Owen's work, but it must have had a very questionable effect upon the children and teachers in the schools. Being constantly under the eyes of an audience, they probably tended to behave like performers in a show. It also took its toll from Owen. From being a steady, hard-working reformer, he turned into a peripatetic lecturer incapable of staying on any one job for very long. Then too, because the aristocracy and politically powerful came to visit him at New Lanark, he naturally turned to them for aid in his great plan. And naturally they would be the last to upset things as they were.

One of the most noted of the visitors was the Grand Duke Nicholas, later Czar of Russia. He seems to have taken a great fancy to Owen's younger sons, especially David Dale. Owen declares that when Nicholas dined at Owen's home he always insisted upon having David Dale on one side of him and William on the other. Nicholas was much impressed with the work done at New Lanark and especially with the industry and skill of British workers. Since his arrival in Britain, he had heard a great deal about overpopulation of the country; therefore, he offered to settle Owen and two millions of Owen's countrymen with him in Russia to engage in manufacturing "in similar manufacturing communities."²⁸ But Owen refused this offer and also the invitation extended to his sons David Dale and William to go back with Nicholas to Russia.

Robert Dale Owen tells the story of how his father gave the Duke Mrs. Owen's silver dessert set as a memento of his visit to New Lanark. Such a gift seemed to Mrs. Owen and her son Robert altogether ridiculous. He wrote:

My mother, good sensible matron, took exception to any such proceeding. In the case of a friend to whom we owed kindness or gratitude, or to any one who would value the offering for the donor's sake, she would not have grudged her nice forks and spoons, but to the possessor of thousands, a two day's acquaintance, who was not likely to bestow a second thought on the things!—in all

²⁷ See Robert Dale Owen, *Threading My Way*, 114-115.

²⁸ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 146.

which I cordially agreed with her, especially when I found William Sheddon, our butler, lamenting over his empty cases, the glittering contents of which had often excited my childish admiration.²⁹

The Duke of Kent's interest in New Lanark seemed to be genuine and not altogether motivated by the loans made to him by Owen. The Duke had planned on a visit of several days to Owen's great experiment; but the Duchess was in "delicate health," and the trip had to be abandoned. However, he sent Dr. Henry Grey Macnab to make a report on conditions in New Lanark.

Macnab declared in his report that he went to Owen's town with an unfavorable opinion but was completely won over by what he saw. In the first place, he found no evidence that Owen interfered with religious liberty.³⁰ In fact, he became overenthusiastic with what he saw and heard:

After breakfast we went down to this new world of pleasing scenes. The school for the children, of two or four years old, was our first object, and a more pleasing sight to the philanthropist is not to be found, from Johnny Groat's house to the Land's End. The glow of health, of innocent pleasure, and unabashed childish freedom, mantled on their pretty countenances. This melting sight gave me a pleasure which amply repaid the toils of the journey. We then went into the upper school—a school for cleanliness, utility, and neatness, I should suppose not surpassed in the kingdom: they were just commencing, which was by singing a Psalm; then the master went to prayer, and afterwards read a chapter. The boys and girls, placed on opposite sides of the room, then read in the New Testament; a boy read three verses, then a girl three, then a different boy other three, then a girl, and so on alternately. In another part of the room a catechiser was hearing the boys and girls [recite] the Assembly's Catechism.³¹

Macnab certainly seems to have done his part to reassure the orthodox that all was well at New Lanark. He even quoted the figures of illegitimate births (twenty-eight in nine years) to prove the Christian morality of the place.

If he had any doubts about Owen's work at New Lanark, Macnab soon had them dispelled. In fact, he became an enthusiastic exponent of Owen's views and used most of his book to prove that he was.

But after 1824, the year that Owen went to America, some very considerable "reforms" were instituted at New Lanark. It seems

²⁹ Robert Dale Owen, *op. cit.*, 119–120.

³⁰ See Henry Grey Macnab, *The New Views of Mr. Owen of Lanark Critically Examined*, p. 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 100–101.

probable that Owen disposed of a portion of his interest in the mills to invest it in the New Harmony enterprise in America. In any case, his salary as manager stopped in September, 1825, and a new manager was appointed to take charge of the mills.³²

In the *Glasgow Free Press* of January 1826, an article appeared describing the changes that had taken place in the schools at New Lanark after Owen's ties there were severed.³³ It seems that the teachers of dancing and instrumental music were dismissed.

The lessons are all Scriptural, but there is a want both of variety and extent in reading. Rewards and punishments, the life of every seminary, and the soul of improvement, are attached to this system. It is monitorial. In every class there is life, action, emulation. The teacher is a gentleman of education, has long been conversant with the system, and has organized several schools upon the same plan. We heartily wish him success. But the picture has two sides. At another part of the same day, Mr. Owen's system is taught, and, here, rewards and punishments are alike prohibited; so that, with the one gentleman the children must learn; and, with the other, they may or may not. The teacher's utmost efforts are now paralysed by the manacles imposed by the good natured philanthropist. Yet, it is wonderful what the children knew in geography and Natural History, without ever having read a word upon the subject, for they have no text book. All their instruction has been oral. Many of them will run over a blank map, with the utmost facility, and it is almost impossible to puzzle them.³⁴

Owen's work in organizing the schools at New Lanark gave him national standing as an educator. When the House of Commons created a select committee to inquire into the education of the "lower orders," Owen was asked to testify before it in 1816. Some of his evidence is very revealing. For instance, he declared that he had adopted "a combination of the Madras [Bell] and British and Foreign [Lancaster] systems, with other parts that experience has pointed out."³⁵ When asked if the expense of conducting the school

³² See letter of J. Wright to Robert Owen, December 10, 1825, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

³³ Although Owen no longer continued as manager of the New Lanark mills after September of 1825, his connections there were not altogether broken. He still had some interest in the property. In 1831, his solicitor, John Wright, wrote to Owen that the latter had £6,000 invested in the New Lanark mills and that his yearly income from this amount at five per cent was £300.

³⁴ Clipping from the *Glasgow Free Press*, January, 1826, in *Place Manuscript Collection*, No. 27824, p. 97.

³⁵ Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, "Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Education of the Lower Orders of the Metropolis," *Sessional Papers*, XVII, 1816, p. 238.

was very great, Owen answered: "It is, apparently; but I do not know how any capital can be employed to make such abundant returns, as that which is judiciously expended in forming the character and directing the labour of the lower classes."³⁶

Throughout his entire testimony runs the single thread that education was to be for the formation of character. The subject matter taught the children was important, but vastly more important was the ethical content. The children must be taught attitudes—the proper attitudes toward their fellow pupils and toward society generally. These attitudes, or habits, as Owen called them, are not easily deducible to exact formula. Perhaps as nearly as Owen ever reached concreteness in explaining what he meant by teaching good habits is to be found in his instructions to his teachers: the children must not be punished, and the teachers must give to the pupils an example of kindness and love.

In all his work on behalf of educating the children, Owen walks along with the great educators of all time. Like Plato, the problem to Owen was one of teaching good habits. He was not concerned with the mere mechanics of learning. Reading, writing, music, dancing, and play were means to an end. The end was to make the children good members of a community. They must be taught through examples and their studies to love one another. The church he found unequal to this task, because its emphasis was upon formal subject matter that never reached the comprehension of young minds.

In grasping the importance of infant education, Owen forever deserves well of those who have come after him. Perhaps long after he is forgotten as a social messiah he will be remembered as a founder of infant schools.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

CHAPTER VI

THE POOR

THE YEARS that followed the publication of the essays were immensely busy ones for Owen. Committees, reports, speeches, and petitions kept him perpetually before the public. He now became a national figure. *The Times* gave him whole pages. The Duke of Kent borrowed money from him and presided over meetings called by Owen to help the poor. The Archbishop of Canterbury, in spite of Owen's raps at the church, listened while Owen read from the manuscript of his essays. To show his friendship for Owen, he begged him to drop formality and call him plain Mr. Sutton.

The cries of distress from the unemployed grew louder and louder. The government headed by Lord Liverpool came to be daily more desperate. Men of property, fearful lest they lose all, were ready for extreme measures.

It was in these troubled times that the cotton spinner of New Lanark launched in England a new plan of salvation. Heretofore he had concerned himself largely with the problem of how to educate the poor, but now there came to him a new vision that was to endure without fading throughout his life.

It was a new society he visioned, where men would live rationally in communities for the common good. Owen materialized his dream by drawing the most intriguing plans for a village of coöperation where the poor might make themselves self-supporting.

The privileged class, seeing their wealth disappearing into the bottomless gulf of the poor rates, listened eagerly while Owen explained his plan. But presently some grew suspicious that all workers might enter the villages and an end might be made of all private property. Lord Lauderdale was one of those who saw very clearly where the philanthropist of New Lanark was going. After Owen had shown him a prospectus of his "village," the noble lord remarked: "But what will become of us?" Owen was ready with an answer:

We shall not meddle with you. Your titles, your rank, shall not be meddled with. You may shut yourselves up in your parks as usual; but when you peep over the walls, you will find us all so happy in our villages of co-operation, that

you will of your own accord throw away privileges that only interfere with your own happiness.¹

Out of the distress of the poor came the new economic philosophy. The poor rates had risen from £5,400,000 in 1815 to £6,900,000 in 1817.² "What is to be done with the poor?" came to be the cry that went up all over the land. Owen, in this emergency, stepped forward with a plan of relief.

In 1816 a meeting was held in the City of London Tavern presided over by the Duke of York. This meeting was attended by many of the most prominent persons in England, who met to discuss the problem of dealing with the poor. Accordingly, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury to make an investigation. Owen tells in his autobiography of how he appeared before the committee and gave his analysis of the causes of the distress and offered a remedy.³ The committee then asked him to submit his plan.⁴ This plan was later presented as a report to a select committee of the House of Commons created for the purpose of inquiring into the poor laws.

The report set forth Owen's scheme for the creation of villages of cooperation and contained the germ of socialism. First of all came Owen's analysis of the causes of the prevailing distress. Machinery—the new machinery with its wide-spread displacement of human labor—lay at the root of the trouble. Right on the heels of the greatly increased productive power stimulated by the long war came peace and the loss of markets. Owen declared :

Now, however, new circumstances have arisen. The war demand for the productions of labour having ceased, markets could no longer be found for them; and the revenues of the world were inadequate to purchase that which a power so enormous in its effects did produce: a diminished demand consequently followed. When, therefore, it became necessary to contract the sources of supply, it soon proved that mechanical power was much cheaper than human labour; the former, in consequence, was continued at work, while the latter was super-

¹ The *Black Dwarf*, XII, 447 (June 1, 1824).

² See Porter, *Progress of the Nation*, pp. 444-445.

³ Owen was, according to himself, on the committee. He said he never knew who proposed him. He and a Mr. Mortlock, also on the committee, had breakfast together and went on to the committee meeting. Members were leading statesmen, economists, and business men. Owen told Mortlock at breakfast his views on the cause of the suffering of the poor, and that was how he happened to be called upon to tell his fellow committee members his ideas on the subject. It seems that Mortlock urged Owen in a loud voice at the meeting to get up and tell the committee what he had said at breakfast.

⁴ See Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 124-126.

seded; and human labour may now be obtained at a price far less than is absolutely necessary for the subsistence of the individual in ordinary comfort.⁵

This language sounds strangely modern. How often in the last few years have we heard the same words, the same explanation of the economic distress of our own time!

Owen moved on to his great cure. The poor must be employed productively and surrounded by favorable circumstances so that they might form good habits. To that end Owen advocated the establishment of villages of 500 to 1,500 persons on tracts of land equipped with buildings for the lodging of the people and for the carrying on of manufacturing. The buildings were to be arranged in the form of a parallelogram; hence arose the expression "Owen's Parallelograms," repeated again and again over the length and breadth of the land.

If the community were to consist of 1,200 persons, at least 1,200 acres of land must be provided. The cost was estimated by Owen at £96,000, if the land were to be purchased. Of course it was the great cost that proved the chief objection to his plan. The socialistic features were not at once realized, because the project was designed only for the poor. It was advanced as an alternative to the poor rates.

The people were to carry on farming and manufacturing coöperatively. And, as Owen optimistically figured, they would be able to support themselves and leave a surplus to pay for the use of the capital required.⁶ In the cultivation of the soil, he planned on the use of the spade. Owen had become a convert to the spade husbandry proposed by William Falla.⁷

At the end of his report, Owen summarized the advantages of his plan. The cost, he admitted, would be great; but in the long run he felt the scheme to be economical. The dividends would largely be in the form of better human products that would result from improved conditions. On the more material side, he argued that poor rates would be unnecessary. It was this particular point that caught the fancy of many in England. Another significant

⁵ Robert Owen, "Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, referred to the Committee of the House of Commons on the Poor Laws. March, 1817." *Life*, by Robert Owen, I, 53-64 (Appendix I).

⁶ See *Ibid.*

⁷ See below, chap. IX, p. 86.

advantage, according to Owen, was that under his plan the use of machinery might be encouraged to increase the productivity of labor.⁸ This seems at a first glance to be inconsistent with his spade husbandry; but it must be borne in mind that he considered that form of cultivation more productive.

The report created a sensation in England. *The Times* and *Morning Post* took it up, and for a time "Mr. Owen" was the most talked of man in Britain. *The Times* in the issue of April 9, 1817, published Owen's "Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor"; and later, May 29, it printed Owen's plan in full together with a drawing showing a village of coopération beautifully arranged in quadrangles. There was also a letter from Owen explaining in detail the scheme. Nor was this all; *The Times* was generous enough to give him a sympathetic editorial:

The appearance which our journal assumes this day, shows the importance which we attach to the celebrated plan of Mr. Owen, of Lanark for the employment, maintenance, comfort, and improvement of the poor. We have before stated the difficulties which would occur in the consummation of the plan, and shall not advert to them now, when it is simply our duty to lay the plan itself before the country. It would be superfluous to attempt to explain that which is itself an explanation. Suffice it to say, therefore, that it is founded in a consideration of the advantages to be derived in the dispatch of work, from the division of labour among several hands. If there appears a little of the ardour of enthusiasm in the manner in which Mr. Owen speaks of the success of his plan, we ask, what great work was ever accomplished but by enthusiasm? and, in truth, it is that spirit which is alone able to overcome, in the execution of its projects, those impediments which it may have overlooked in the contemplation of them. Besides, Mr. Owen is not a theorist only, but a man long and practically familiarized to the management of the poor; we are, therefore, most desirous that a trial should be made of his plan in at least one instance.⁹

The *Morning Post* spoke in flattering terms of "that distinguished philanthropist Mr. Owen of Lanark. . . . His appeal, founded as it is upon genuine reason, virtue, and humanity, cannot possibly fail of success; and while he is earnestly entitled to the thanks and gratitude of his country, future ages will have cause to revere his memory, as the virtuous author of universal public

⁸ See Robert Owen, *op. cit.*

⁹ May 29, 1817.

good, and as one of the most distinguished and worthy benefactors of the human race."¹⁰

Glowing words were these. Owen was now at the very height of his power and influence. Lord Liverpool promised to call upon him at Bedford Square for an inspection of his "model" village.¹¹ Indeed, Owen never lost one opportunity to explain his system to the prime minister either through an interview or by letter.

An example of Owen's influence during this period of his essays and plan for the poor is to be found in a letter from Fanny Godwin to her half-sister, Mary. After writing about the riots and general distress in England, Fanny came down to a discussion of Owen:

They talk of a change of ministers; but this can effect no good; it is a change of the whole system of things that is wanted. Mr. Owen [Owen of New Lanark], however, tells us to cheer up, for that in two years we shall feel the good effects of his plans; he is quite certain that they will succeed. I have no doubt he will do a great deal of good; but how he can expect to make the rich give up their possessions, and live in a state of equality, is too romantic to be believed. . . . I hate and am sick at heart at the misery I see my fellow-beings suffering, but I own I should not like to live to see the extinction of all genius, talent, and elevated generous feeling in Great Britain, which I conceive to be the natural consequence of Mr. Owen's plans. I am not either wise enough, nor historian enough, to say what will make man plain and simple in manner and mode of life, and at the same time a poet, a painter, and a philosopher; but this I know, that I had rather live with the Genevese, as you and Jane describe, than live in London with the most brilliant beings that exist, in its present state of vice and misery. So much for Mr. Owen, who is indeed, a very great and good man. He told me the other day that he wished our mother was living, as he had never met with a person who thought so exactly as he did, or who would have so warmly and zealously entered into his plans.¹²

Owen's day of glory was soon over. Its fading was not altogether due to the attacks of the Malthusians, who kept up a steady fire, or to those who doubted that his people would work without the incentive of private gain; but he himself very deliberately pursued a policy that ruined his cause. On August 21, 1817, Owen, filled with the crusading spirit, addressed a meeting in the City of London Tavern. It was at this time that he made his famous denunciation of religions.

¹⁰ August 9, 1817, cited in Robert Owen, *Life*, IA, 92 (Appendix I, No. 3).

¹¹ See letter of Lord Liverpool to Robert Owen, May 26, 1819, in *Liverpool Papers*, No. 38278. MSS.

¹² Edward Dowden, *Life of Shelley*, II, 39-40.

The hall was crowded with the intelligentsia of London. Most in evidence were members of the clergy, who must have scented an attack upon their prerogatives. Members of Parliament and economists, skeptical minded but anxious to know more of "Mr. Owen," filed into the great room.

Owen, dressed in black broadcloth, nervously fumbled at his papers as he sat on the platform waiting for the chairman to introduce him. The meeting had been called to take measures for the relief of the poor, and it was expected that "Mr. Owen of New Lanark" would confine himself to that problem. But when he began his address, the audience soon became aware that he was interpreting pretty broadly his assignment.

Owen started out with a few words on the problem of the unemployed, and then his tone changed from one of quiet assertion to a challenging note not altogether in keeping with his ordinarily gentle and persuasive manner.

Why should so many countless millions of our fellow-creatures, through each successive generation, [he demanded,] have been the victims of ignorance, of superstition, of mental degradation, and of wretchedness?

My friends, a more important question has never yet been put to the sons of men! Who *can* answer? who *dare* answer it,—but with his life in his hand; a ready and willing victim to truth, and to the emancipation of the world from its long bondage of disunion, error, crime, and misery?

Behold that victim! On this day—in this hour—even now—shall those bonds be burst asunder, never more to reunite while the world shall last. What the consequences of this daring deed shall be to myself, I am as indifferent about as whether it shall rain or be fair to-morrow. Whatever may be the consequences, I will now perform my duty to you, and to the world; and should it be the last act of my life, I shall be well content, and know that I have lived for an important purpose.

Then, my friends, I tell you, that hitherto you have been prevented from even knowing what happiness really is, solely in consequence of the errors—gross errors—that have been combined with the fundamental notions of every religion that has hitherto been taught to men. And, in consequence, they have made man the most inconsistent, and the most miserable being in existence. By the errors of these systems he has been made a weak, imbecile animal; a furious bigot and fanatic; or a miserable hypocrite; and should these qualities be carried, not only into the projected villages, but *into Paradise itself, a Paradise would be no longer found!*¹³

¹³ Robert Owen, "Address Delivered at the City of London Tavern on Thursday, August 21st, and Published in the London Newspaper of August 22nd, 1817," *Life*, by Robert Owen, I.A, 108–118 (Appendix I).

There was much more in the same vein in his speech. Owen was deadly in earnest. Nothing in his attack suggested mere sensationalism or desire to seek notoriety by provoking controversy. Religion, to him, was irrational and unscientific; therefore, it could have no place in his new social order. Though he was then forty-six years old, he possessed all the enthusiasm, all the naïveté of a very young man who had just lately discovered that perhaps the Bible was not true "from cover to cover."

Owen declared in his *Life* that his message was received with favor for the most part. But the volume of opposition grew steadily from this time. He was now branded an "infidel" and looked upon as a dangerous man by the respectable classes. Owen told of his encounter with Henry Brougham the day after the meeting at the City of London Tavern:

As a proof of the impression which my declaration at the last meeting against all the religions of the world had made on the British public, my friend Henry Brougham, since known as Lord Brougham, and Lord Chancellor of England, saw me the day after the meeting walking in the streets of the metropolis, and came to me, saying—"How the devil, Owen, could you say what you did yesterday at your public meeting! If any of us" (meaning the then so-called Liberal party in the House of Commons,) "had said half as much, we should have been burned alive,—and here are you quietly walking as if nothing had occurred!"¹⁴

All the committees and meetings came to nothing. There was much talk, a little money subscribed, but "Mr. Owen's villages" still remained only on paper or as a model to show the curious. The economists were forever standing up and condemning the plan as unsound and impractical. For instance, Major Torrens spoke up after Owen had finished at the City of London Tavern meeting. Torrens wanted Owen to face the population problem. Was Malthus right or wrong? Would not "Mr. Owen's plan" bring about a great embarrassment of numbers? Torrens, like most economists of his day, thought England overpopulated.¹⁵ To these questions Owen made no satisfactory answer—at least no reply satisfactory to his opponents. It was not enough for him to push the questions airily to one side by the remark that agricultural science might increase food production by fifty per cent.

¹⁴ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 164.

¹⁵ See *The Times* (London), August 22, 1817.

David Ricardo saw other difficulties in Owen's plan. He thought that the money invested in the villages would not yield interest and said as much at a public meeting with the Duke of Kent in the chair.¹⁶ And later on, in Parliament, Ricardo "observed, that he was completely at war with the system of Mr. Owen, which was built upon a theory inconsistent with the principles of political economy, and in his opinion was calculated to produce infinite mischief to the community. . . . He [Owen] would dispense with ploughs and horses in the increase of the productions of the country, although the expense as to them must be much less when compared with the support of men."¹⁷

Ricardo was opposed to the government going into any "commercial experiment;" but if spade husbandry was what it had been represented to be, then he thought the government might well "circulate useful information and correct prejudices. They [the government] should separate such considerations from a division of the country into parallelograms, or the establishment of a community of goods, and similar visionary schemes."¹⁸

The Times, so sympathetic at the start, began to cool off toward the close of the summer of 1817. In an editorial taking up a column of space, it pointed out that Owen had added little by way of explanation of his scheme in a meeting that he had called for August 14. *The Times* further declared that the paupers in Owen's community might not work as hard as under private ownership and thus might become "perpetual state charges." It also urged Malthus' doctrine of population as an argument against the community idea: "Is not Mr. Owen's plan, therefore, calculated to create a second generation of paupers, only for the purpose of starving them?"¹⁹

Late in 1819, Owen's proposition came before the House of Commons in the form of a motion made by Sir William De Crespigny to refer it to a select committee. Crespigny was a personal friend of Owen's and often a guest at Braxfield House in New Lanark. He knew of Owen's work at first hand and spoke in glowing terms

¹⁶ See *Ibid.*, July 10, 1819.

¹⁷ *Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*: Published under the Superintendence of T. C. Hansard, ser. 1, Vol. XLI, p. 1206. House of Commons, session of Thursday, December 16, 1819. Hereafter this series will be cited as Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1206-1207.

¹⁹ August 15, 1817.

of the good things done at New Lanark in education, especially in teaching the children to read the Bible and in acquainting them with their duties to God, to their parents, and to themselves.²⁰

Henry Brougham spoke for the motion, but he was quite emphatic in declaring against Owen's general principles.

He was desirous not to be understood as meaning to agree to Mr. Owen's plan. He conceived the theory on which it was founded to be wholly erroneous. It was founded upon a principle which he denied—that of the increase of population being a benefit to the country. On the contrary, he had no hesitation in stating, that the excess of population was one of the great causes of the distress which at present afflicted the country. Yet this proposition, which, from the best consideration which he had been able to give to the subject, he was fully prepared to maintain was quite discarded by the theory of Mr. Owen. . . . But to return to Mr. Owen's plan—although he differed from the theory upon which that plan was founded, especially upon the subject of population, and thought it would increase the evil of which it was the ostensible remedy, he still agreed with the hon. baronet who brought forward the motion, and the noble lord by whom it was seconded, that there were certain parts of that plan peculiarly entitled to the consideration of the House. He meant especially upon the subject of education. The system proposed and acted upon by Mr. Owen in training infant children, before they were susceptible of what was generally called education, was deserving of the utmost attention. This indeed was the sound part of Mr. Owen's plan, and agreeable to the wisest principles. By all means then, he would say, let the House appoint a committee to inquire into the means by which those parts of Mr. Owen's plan, against which no objections could be made, might best be put in general practice.²¹

Before Brougham sat down, he paid his respects to Owen's character. Owen "he really believed one of the most humane, simple-minded, amiable men on earth. He was indeed a rare character; for although a projector, Mr. Owen was one of the most calm and candid men he had ever conversed with. You might discuss his theories in any terms you pleased—you might dispose of his arguments just as you thought proper; and he listened with the utmost mildness. His nature perfectly free from any gall, he had none of the feverish or irritable feeling which too generally belonged to projectors."²²

In the course of the debate, much was made of Owen's religious views. Nicholas Vansittart, the chancellor of the exchequer, ex-

²⁰ See *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, ser. 1, XLI, 1191. House of Commons, session of Thursday, December 16, 1819.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1195–1197.

²² *Ibid.*, 1199.

plained that he was opposed to Owen because his scheme was based on the rejection of the authority of government and religion.²³ So what with Owen's heretical religious ideas and his failure to satisfy the House on the population question, the motion to appoint a select committee was lost.²⁴

Once again in 1821 Owen's scheme for the relief of the poor came before Parliament. James Maxwell moved in the House of Commons that a royal commission be appointed to report on the establishment at New Lanark. The motion was opposed on the grounds that it meant the regimentation of people and the doing away with revealed religion. Wilberforce spoke in opposition, as he did in 1819; but he did not mention Owen's religious heresies.

The Marquis of Londonderry did not think it was the business of Parliament to decide on the prospects of Owen's plan:

The hon. member [Maxwell] had told us that the spade was preferable to the plough, and that we should never be happy until we were all digging; that a cotton manufactory could never be carried out well until there was a Mr. Owen to take care of the morals of the people when they came out of the mill, so that society would lose its dispersed and independent character, and would be reduced to a system of machinery, which the hon. member would drive out of the world, except as applied to human beings. . . . There were large and intelligent bodies which had a direct and lively interest in any plan for the improvement of the administration of the poor; and it was not necessary to a trial of Mr. Owen's plan (if it held out any prospects) that the country should be carved out into parallelograms, in order to put the poor under the management of the exchequer. The state of discipline recommended by Mr. Owen might be applicable enough to poor-houses; but it was by no means applicable to the feelings of a free nation.²⁵

George Canning explained that he had promised Owen he would be present when the motion came up, but that did not mean he would support it. Canning concurred with what Londonderry had said: that the plan "would lead to the complete destruction of individuality, and to the amalgamation of the population into masses, which was totally repugnant to the principles of human nature, and above all, to the genius of the people of this country."²⁶ Canning also asserted that simply because Owen's establishment at New Lanark had been successful was no sure indication of its

²³ See *Ibid.*, 1205.

²⁴ See *Ibid.*, 1217.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ser. 2, V, 1321-1322. House of Commons, session of June 26, 1821.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1324.

success on a large scale.²⁷ And then finally Canning called attention to the antireligious nature of Owen's plan as being contrary to the tendency for all countries to have established religions.²⁸

Joseph Hume, the radical member, also took occasion to whack away at Owen's plan:

...if Mr. Owen's system produced so much happiness with so little care, the adoption of it would make us a race of beings little removed from brutes, only ranging the four corners of a parallelogram, instead of the mazes of a forest.²⁹

Naturally the motion went down before such formidable opposition. Thus "Owen's parallelograms" never received much serious consideration from Parliament.

Owen's project also found little favor with the political radicals like William Cobbett, Henry Hunt, Thomas Attwood, and Major Cartwright. They often attended his public meetings; and after he had set forth his plan with all sweetness and light, some one of them would gain the floor and make a speech for parliamentary reform. The next step would be a resolution putting the meeting on record as favoring their cause as a cure for the evils that existed. In many cases they triumphed over gentle "Mr. Owen," who merely smiled tolerantly and explained that they could not do otherwise, being entirely creatures of circumstance.

Owen fell in for a mild beating at the hands of Jonathan Wooler, another one of the radical group. In his paper, the *Black Dwarf*, he accused Owen of having copied the ideas of Thomas Spence, who advocated the nationalization of land. Spence and some of the land reformers had suffered imprisonment, as Wooler pointed out; but Owen had been able to tirade cabinet ministers and make them like it. Wooler in his article declared that the toleration shown Owen was due to the necessity of appeasing and diverting the public to keep it away from reflecting on reform and reduced taxation. As for Owen's plan, he had this to say:

But these gentlemen [the capitalists] do not seem much disposed to hazard their property out of their own line. They do not enter into the sublime enthusiasm of an establishment, where Englishmen are to be metamorphosed into daily slaves; and urged by taskmasters to a duty that only *promises* them a mere subsistence, without the chance of rising in society—a prospect

²⁷ See *Ibid.*

²⁸ See *Ibid.*, 1325.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1322.

which however darkened by the clouds of the day, is the only rational impulse to labour—the only link that binds the interests of man in observance of the laws, and the obligations that he owes to society.³⁰

Apparently Wooler was present at Owen's meeting held in the City of London Tavern on the fourteenth of August; for he appeared somewhat nettled at Owen's superior tone:

Mr. Owen ought to have been very peculiarly indebted to his opponents, instead of treating them with reproaches of ignorance. He told the meeting that *opposition* would only *accelerate his plan*: and if this be true, his plan will proceed very fast indeed; for never was opposition more general: and if it keep pace with that feeling, it will cover the land shortly with "breeding-barracks," as a person at the meeting said he supposed they were meant to be, when he heard the name of the Duke of Wellington proposed on the committee. At the next meeting he proposed to ask "for a general, that is a numerous and *highly intelligent committee of severe scrutiny and investigation*," but what means will he take to summon such men to the assembly, when he confesses that his first meeting was composed of blockheads who could not comprehend his plan! and of speakers whose objections were "so little to the purpose, so futile, and contrary to daily experience, and evinced so much real ignorance of the subject before them."³¹

Wooler naturally thought Owen's panacea unworkable and declared that Owen "is endeavouring to do that which he would lament to see done, if it were possible that it could succeed."³²

The political radicals sniped away at these plans of his as utterly inadequate, but the most devastating attack came from the economists armed with the arguments of Thomas Robert Malthus. And even Malthus himself had something to say directly on Owen's schemes for the relief of the poor. The ratepayers now had a champion who talked the language of science.

³⁰ "Mr. Owen's Plan for the Growth of Paupers," *Black Dwarf*, I, 465-475 (August 20, 1817).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER VII

THE CONSCIENCE OF THE RICH

UNTIL MALTHUS published his essay on population, the relief of the poor was looked upon as a Christian duty. But once his ideas came to be generally known by the well-to-do classes, they declared with great enthusiasm: "Our very bounty to the poor may prove their ruin. If we feed them liberally, they will rear up a fresh army of paupers for us to care for." Malthus did indeed prove a strong fortress for the conscience of the rich. Behind the great walls of his arguments the calloused hid, deaf to the cries of the hungry.

It was in 1817 that Malthus in the sixth edition of *An Essay on the Principles of Population* took notice of Owen's plans:

Among the plans which appear to have excited a considerable degree of the public attention, is one of Mr. Owen. I have already adverted to some views of Mr. Owen in a chapter on Systems of Equality, and spoken of his experience with the respect which is justly due to it. If the question were merely how to accommodate, support and train, in the best manner, societies of 1,200 people, there are perhaps few persons more entitled to attention than Mr. Owen: but in the plan which he has proposed, he seems totally to have overlooked the nature of the problem to be solved. This problem is, *How to provide for those who are in want, in such a manner as to prevent a continual increase of their numbers, and of the proportion which they bear to the whole society.* And it must be allowed that Mr. Owen's plan not only does not make the slightest approach towards accomplishing this object, but seems to be peculiarly calculated to effect an object exactly the reverse of it, that is, to increase and multiply the number of paupers.¹

Malthus then took a closer view of Owen's plan and proceeded to hammer it as a scheme destined to reward the industrious and the profligate equally. He also pointed to what he believed would happen if Owen's communities were carried into effect:

The labourer or manufacturer who is now ill lodged and ill clothed, and obliged to work twelve hours a day to maintain his family, could have no motive to continue his exertions, if the reward for slackening them, and seeking parish assistance, was good lodging, good clothing, the maintenance and education of all his children, and the exchange of twelve hours hard work in an unwholesome manufactory for four or five hours of easy agricultural

¹ P. 518.

labour on a pleasant farm. Under these temptations, the numbers yearly falling into the new establishments from the labouring and manufacturing classes, together with the rapid increase by procreation of the societies themselves, would very soon render the first purchases of land utterly incompetent to their support. More land must then be purchased and fresh settlements made; and if the higher classes of society were bound to proceed in the system according to its apparent spirit and intention, there cannot be a doubt that the whole nation would shortly become a nation of paupers with a community of goods.

Such a result might not perhaps be alarming to Mr. Owen. It is just possible indeed that he may have had this result in contemplation when he proposed this plan, and have thought that it was the best mode of quietly introducing that community of goods which he believes is necessary to complete the virtue and happiness of society.²

Malthus went on to argue that the success of the New Lanark experiment was no ground for believing that Owen's idea of pauper communities would be a success. The principle of private property still prevailed at New Lanark and acted as a spur to keep the lazy and improvident in line.

Finally, Malthus delivered the following broadside at Owen:

On the whole, then, it may be concluded, that Mr. Owen's plan would have to encounter obstacles that really appear to be insuperable, even at its first outset; and that if these could by any possible means be overcome, and the most complete success attained, the system would, without some most unnatural and unjust laws to prevent the progress of population, lead to a state of universal poverty and distress, in which, though all the rich might be made poor, none of the poor could be made rich—not even so rich as a common labourer at present.³

Malthus and other social writers of his day were completely wrapped up in the idea that England was overpopulated. The wide acceptance of this idea by legislators and the propertied classes colored all local and national policies. Future generations, when Great Britain had attained a population of some forty-five millions, might look back and smile at their apprehension; but in Owen's day there was every reason to believe that Britain suffered from an excess of people. The means of production had been greatly multiplied, and yet thousands were on parish relief. How many times in the history of man's social and economic struggles has there occurred a situation leading men to make a diagnosis

² Pp. 518–519.

³ P. 520.

entirely false! In economic depressions they cry out that machinery is the cause of distress, that scarcity of money is at the root of the trouble, and that overproduction or underconsumption brings about the evil. Then time moves on and gives the lie to them all.

Malthus' theory looked plausible to Owen's generation; but as the western world has grown more populous, perhaps beyond the dreams of Malthus, less is heard of the dangers of overpopulation. The creative adaptability of living organisms defies prediction. Men have indeed increased their capacity to produce food; they have also learned how to check their birth rate.

Owen was not seriously disturbed by Malthus and his followers, unless we believe the stories that have been told of his visiting France to learn of the contraceptive devices used in that country.

Late in 1823 James Macphail, a friend of Francis Place, wrote a letter to the *Labourer's Friend and Handicrafts Chronicle*, in which he incorporated an excerpt from a letter written by Place. The editor of the journal published the letter and story over the initials "J.M." Macphail also sent the story to the *Black Dwarf* at the same time. Place's name was not mentioned anywhere in the article, but he was undoubtedly the author of the letter which ran as follows:

You, I am sure, will give that truly benevolent man, Mr. Robert Owen, credit for good intentions, whatever opinion you may entertain of me, as an unknown correspondent. I will therefore relate an anecdote respecting him. It was objected to his plan that the number of children which would be produced in his communities would be so great, and the deaths from vices, misery, and bad management, so few, that the period of doubling the number of people would be very short, and that consequently in no very long period his whole plan would become abortive. Mr. Owen felt the force of this objection, and sought the means of averting the consequences.⁴

Place declared that Owen learned of the small number of children in French families and the relatively higher standard of living enjoyed by them, especially in the South of France. This led him to visit France, where he obtained information and devices used by the French for the prevention of conception.

⁴ "Mr. Owen and Mr. Malthus," *Black Dwarf*, XI, 499-500 (October 1, 1823). Also, the original draft of the letter is in the *Place Collection*, MSS., LXVIII, 115.

Place's letter added that Owen gave two of these contrivances to a friend who had been the cause of the inquiry.⁵ The letter continued:

Mr. Owen no longer feared a too rapid increase of the people in his communities; he saw at once what to him was most desirable, the means of marrying all his people at an early age, and limiting their progeny to any desirable extent. Ask him, and he will acknowledge what is here asserted. Do not then condemn this virtuous man to punishment here and hereafter, because he entertains opinions which you call abominable. What Mr. Owen saw would be the greatest of all evils in his communities, is the greatest of all evils in the great community of this nation; and is tenfold increased in the community which composes the Irish people.⁶

Macphail in introducing this statement by Place made it clear that the stories circulated to the effect that Owen was putting the French contraceptives into practice at New Lanark were of doubtful validity:

It is reported that one of his [Owen's] plans is to prevent a too rapid increase of population, and that he has already introduced it among the people employed by him. The reported method is obscure and abominable, [and] contrary to the holy laws of God. It is, indeed, divulged in anonymous printed papers [that is, "Diabolical Hand Bills"], circulated in and about London. . . . An anonymous information [he concluded] is not to be believed, but it ought to lead to inquiry.⁷

Richard Carlile, who devoted his paper, the *Republican*, to extreme measures, seized with great fervor upon the story of Owen's advocacy of contraceptives to keep the population within bounds. In the issue of his paper published May 6, 1825, the following appeared:

I think this plan for the prevention of conceptions good, after getting rid of as much prejudice upon the subject as the most fantastical can assume; after three years of consideration; after passing a year with a feeling almost like dread of giving it thought; I now, so think it good, and so publicly say it. Still, it is not my plan; it was not sought after by me; it was submitted to

⁵ Norman E. Himes in his study of "The Place of John Stuart Mill and of Robert Owen in the History of English Neo-Malthusianism," published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XLII, 627-640 (August, 1928), suggested that Francis Place might be the friend mentioned.

⁶ "Mr. Owen and Mr. Malthus," *Black Dwarf*, XI, 499-500 (October 1, 1823). Also the original draft of the letter is in the *Place Collection*, MSS., LXVIII, 115.

⁷ *Labourer's Friend*, cited by Norman E. Himes, "The Place of John Stuart Mill and of Robert Owen in the History of English Neo-Malthusianism," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XLII, 627-640 (August, 1928).

my consideration; and, I am informed, that it was introduced into this country by Mr. Owen of New Lanark. The story of its English or British origin goes thus. It was suggested to Mr. Owen, that, in his new establishments, the healthy state of the inhabitants, would tend to breed an excess of children. The matter was illustrated and explained to him, so that he felt the force of it. He was also told, that, on the continent, the women used some means of preventing conceptions, which were uniformly successful. Mr. Owen set out for Paris to discover the process. He consulted the most eminent physicians and assured himself of what was the common practice among their women, that the female was always prepared to absorb the semen and its influence by a small piece of sponge, at the time of coition, and not to allow it to impregnate the genital vessels. . . .⁸

This was a pretty plain statement and created no little stir. In fact, the air was filled with talk about the "beastly devices" to limit the number of children. Owen took no notice of these stories about his journey to Paris. It was not until a friend brought Carlile's article to his attention that Owen replied.

But meantime, two years had passed—two years in which there had been a gale of talk relative to Owen's position. During these years Owen had gone to America, had embarked on a great adventure there, and had reluctantly written *finis* to his dream.⁹ When he returned home, he finally made himself clear in a letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* and also in a journal called the *Sphynx*. William Cobbett, who had entered the fight against Owen and the Malthusians, reprinted the article published in the *Sphynx* but evidently missed the one in the *Chronicle*, which was substantially the same. Owen wrote in his letter to the *Sphynx*:

Sir,—Being informed by a friend, a few days ago, of a work, published by Mr. Carlile, in which my name was used in a *very extraordinary manner*, I immediately called upon Mr. Carlile, who, for the *first time*, I saw on Saturday last.

On inquiry, I learned from him, *that he had been entirely misinformed on the subject of that publication, so far as it concerned myself*; and when I informed him that the facts which I had been told were contained in it were, in all respects, the reverse of the truth, *he expressed the greatest regret, and offered to make every reparation in his power*.

I left him to consider what ought to be done; I called upon him again yesterday afternoon, and obtained copies of the publication in which my name had been *so unwarrantably used*, and for the first time I read them last night.

⁸ "Institutions of Celibacy," *Republican*, XI, 555–556 (May 6, 1825).

⁹ See below, chaps. X, XI, XII, and XIII.

They are of such a nature, that I deem it necessary to say, that I had not the slightest knowledge of their publication, and that the facts are precisely the opposite of the particulars stated. . . .¹⁰

Owen then went on to explain why he had gone to the continent. The purpose was to place his sons in Fellenberg's school at Hofwyl and "to communicate generally with the most enlightened statesmen, philanthropists, and men of science in France, Switzerland, and Germany, upon the best means to remedy the growing evils of society, arising from the daily introduction of new powers, which, misdirected, threatened to involve the mass of the population of all countries in misery; but the subject alluded to by Mr. Carlile was not, in a single instance, mentioned by any one of the parties."¹¹

Owen seized the opportunity to take issue with Malthus on the population question. He declared that Malthus must have had in mind man in the more primitive state when he formed his views; while Owen drew his conclusions from man "overwhelmed with artificial means of production. . . ."¹²

At other times Owen insisted that man, with scientific knowledge enabling him to produce more and more food, would be able to live for many thousands of years without danger of overpopulation. But this goal would be attained only if man lived rationally.

It was Cobbett that drew Owen out to make an emphatic denial of his connection with the "beastly" French devices. Without going to the trouble of making an investigation, Cobbett tore into Owen in the columns of his famous *Register*. In one issue he spoke of Owen as the "Beastly Owen" and put him in the same crowd with Malthus and the "surplus population mongers." Such violent language brought Owen's disciples to their feet. One wrote to Cobbett protesting the attack. Cobbett attempted to justify his language by declaring that Owen had never denied what Carlile had printed. Cobbett did not know that Owen had been in America during much of the time after the story appeared in the London papers. He also seemed not to have noticed Owen's denial in the London *Morning Chronicle* and the *Sphinx*.

¹⁰ "Mr. Owen's Disclaimer of Sentiments Imputed to Him," *The Sphinx*, n. d. Cited by William Cobbett, "Owen of Lanark," *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, LXIV, 536-555 (November 24, 1827).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

After the denial had been borne in upon Cobbett, he still persisted in believing that Owen was connected with the "beastly" Carlile and the Malthusians. He insisted that Owen had made use of an obscure journal, meaning the *Sphynx*, to deny his connection with the "beastly" scheme to limit the population. He also held it against Owen that he should have been associated in any way with Father Rapp, who had founded the little community in Indiana, U.S.A., that Owen purchased when he went to America to launch his great experiment.¹³ Rapp, according to Cobbett, was so ardent a defender of celibacy that he laid down the rule that any woman in his community giving birth to a child "*for the space of five years*" should forfeit her share of the property, and the father was to suffer a similar disability.¹⁴

In the end Cobbett found Owen's "very *mild tone*" in dealing with Carlile an indication of his guilt:

I put it to the reader: I put it to any one of my readers, whether, if he had been thus held forth to his countrymen as the prime apostle of this system of beastliness, I put to him whether he, in such a case, would have gone like a lambkin and talked to, and of, his MISTER CARLILE? No; he would have gone with a summons to take him before a Magistrate, or with a broomstick to break his bones. I should want little more than this gentleness in such a case, to convince me that Mr. OWEN'S system *is a bad one*.¹⁵

Cobbett was not the man to appreciate the "*mild tone*" of Owen. Such sweet reasonableness formed no part of the nature of that violent controversialist.

Generations of men have regarded Owen as the founder of Neo-Malthusianism. They have done this very largely upon the basis of the story that Owen stoutly denied. The legend received additional support at the hands of Dr. James Bonar, whose book, *Malthus and His Work*, has stood as an authoritative study on the subject. Bonar said of Owen and Neo-Malthusianism: "This is not the place to discuss the questions associated in our times with Neo-Malthusianism. But it is probable that the Neo-Malthusians are the children not of Robert Malthus, but of Robert Owen."¹⁶

¹³ See below, chap. X.

¹⁴ "Mr. Owen's Disclaimer of Sentiments Imputed to Him," the *Sphynx*, n.d. Cited by William Cobbett, "Owen of Lanark," *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, LXIV, 536-555 (November 24, 1827).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Malthus and His Work* (1924 ed.), p. 24.

This idea that Robert Owen was the founder of the Neo-Malthusian movement received further support from Professor James A. Field, who believed that Owen brought contraceptives into use at New Lanark.¹⁷ Field was one of the outstanding students of English Neo-Malthusianism.

In a more recent study of Neo-Malthusianism made by Norman E. Himes, Francis Place is given credit for being the founder of English Neo-Malthusianism and not Robert Owen.¹⁸ Everything that Owen wrote and said about population indicates that he himself was not the founder. But in spite of all that might be said against the story of Owen's trip to France and his connection with birth control, the fact remains that his son, Robert Dale Owen, wrote a book on the subject—*Moral Physiology*—and is recognized as an outspoken advocate of the practice. The book was advertised in the *New Moral World*, the organ of the Owenite movement in the 'thirties and 'forties.

Meantime, the Malthusians kept up a steady fire during the period in which Owen was taken seriously as a reformer. They came to meetings of the Owenites and asked troublesome questions, but the reformers would not be denied. They believed, rightly enough, that life could not be reduced to a formula. They saw opportunities for immediate improvement and refused to believe that long-time tendencies, so often the recourse of those who want things to remain as they are, could make such progress impossible.

Indeed, great crowds poured into the Crown and Rolls Rooms to listen to expositions of the "New Social System" from the lips of Owen's disciples. They stayed on for hours while the "Economists" piled up mountains of figures to prove that the promised land of plenty was a mirage.¹⁹ These meetings were often reported as being attended by "numerous respectable females." Perhaps they were attracted by the prospects of a lively discussion of Owen's ideas of love and marriage.

The Malthusians were particularly aggressive in their assault upon Owen's spade husbandry. In the *Edinburgh Review* of Oc-

¹⁷ See James A. Field, *Essays on Population and Other Papers*, 214 (*University of Chicago Studies in Economics*, No. 1).

¹⁸ See Norman E. Himes, "The Place of John Stuart Mill and of Robert Owen in the History of English Malthusianism," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XLII, 627-640 (August, 1928).

¹⁹ See *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I, 56 (February, 1826).

tober, 1819, an anonymous writer criticized Owen's ideas of communities as a way out of the problem of the poor.²⁰ He attacked the community organization as economically unsound and spoke thus of spade husbandry:

By discarding the plough, and performing the work of husbandry without the aid of horses, Mr. Owen might possibly find employment on one of his farms for 1000 instead of for 900 labourers; but though he might thus increase the *gross*, he would infallibly diminish the *net* produce. Assuming, by way of example, that the net produce is reduced from 1000 to 800 quarters of corn, and that the taxes, the rent, and the interest of the money borrowed to erect the village, amounted to 600 quarters, then, that portion of the produce of the soil which is applicable to increase the existing capital, and thus to give employment to additional hands, will be reduced from 400 to 200 quarters. Spade cultivation, therefore, though in the first instance it might allow a greater number of labourers to be engaged on a given surface, would dry up the sources of accumulation and of increased employment; and unless, as we before hinted, Mr. Owen could persuade his villagers not to add to their existing numbers, would in a very short time plunge them into *aggravated* misery.²¹

Meantime, Owen, enjoying perfect health, was not in the least disturbed by such attacks. He looked upon economists as people who had not kept pace with the facts of a growing industrial society.

During the course of the Holkam sheepshearing meetings held in 1819, Owen was confronted with a question put to him by Dr. Rigby of Norwich. After stating that he believed an increase of population to be the surest criterion of the happiness of a people, he then asked Owen whether the population had actually increased in New Lanark. According to reports of the meeting, Owen evaded the question. Perhaps he was afraid that he might commit himself to the Malthusian point of view if he admitted the increase at his great social laboratory.

While Owen apparently did not come to his own defense against the Malthusians, a sympathizer writing under the name of "Britannicus" declared that all the information he could gain pointed to an increase in population at New Lanark, but that this increase was not followed by misery or poverty. In fact, quite the opposite

²⁰ While the article was unsigned, it was obviously written by Major Torrens. See p. 88n.

²¹ "Mr. Owen's Plans for Relieving the National Distress," *Edinburgh Review*, XXXII, 453-475 (October, 1819).

was true. Owen had, by his superior methods, found plenty for all. And so "Britannicus" felt that Owen's opponents were in the wrong when they rushed forward to refute his plans with the bogey of overpopulation.²²

Though the Malthusians had disturbed Owen, they had not shattered his faith in the possibility of progress for men. He saw quite clearly that men go forward on the road to plenty by utilizing to the full the scientific knowledge they stand possessed of and not by mere negative steps.

²² See "To the Editor of the Antijacobin Review," *Antijacobin Review and Protestant Advocate: or Monthly, Political, and Literary Censor*, LVI, 560-565 (August, 1819).

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHILDREN OF THE MILLS

IN THOSE years of dark distress, Owen did more than march from meeting to meeting with pictures of his dream world under his arm. He also crusaded against the brutalities of child labor in the mills. Sometime in 1815 Owen drafted a bill for the regulation of child labor in the factories. For years he had agitated against the system of employing very young children in industry.

It will be recalled that much earlier, in 1802, Sir Robert Peel had fathered a bill that came to be enacted into law for regulating the hours of labor and working conditions of the apprentices in the cotton mills. But this measure was wholly inadequate. It was merely a gesture made to Peel's conscience. The cotton lords meant that it should be no more than that.

Owen opened up his struggle for a genuinely restrictive act in 1815, when he published an article in the *Glasgow Chronicle* entitled "Observations on the Cotton Trade." It was an argument for the repeal of the duties on raw cotton, but at the same time it also contained an eloquent denunciation of "a trade, that, except in name, is more imperious to those employed in it, than is the slavery in the West Indies to the poor African negroes"¹

In this article, Owen had laid down some of the points later to be incorporated in his draft of a factory act. This draft was used in the bill placed before Parliament by the elder Peel. Owen asked that no children be employed before they had reached the age of twelve years, but in the bill the age was placed at ten years. The hours of labor were to be ten and a half, exclusive of time spent for meals, for all children up to eighteen years old. He also included in his draft of the bill presented to Parliament by Peel a provision for daily instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The measure called for such restrictions on child labor in all factories employing more than twenty persons.²

¹ Robert Owen, "Observations on the Cotton Trade," *Life*, by Robert Owen, IA, 13-19 (Appendix F).

² See Robert Owen, "Mr. Owen's Bill for Regulating the Hours of Work in Mills and Factories, as Originally proposed in 1815, and Finally Spoilt. With Observations of Opponents, and the Act Passed in 1819," *Life*, by Robert Owen, IA, 23-32 (Appendix G).

The bill brought forth a storm of protest from the cotton lords. The arguments used against the proposed law have a familiar sound. Some said the trade would be ruined. Others declared it beyond the powers of Parliament to act as a guardian of children; the government would be usurping the place of parents. These arguments and many more came out before the famous committee of 1816 that took evidence. Before this committee of the Commons, Owen gave testimony that ran into twenty-four pages of printed material.³

Owen was not always accurate; nor was he overscrupulous about his statements of so-called facts. Child labor was a great evil to him and should be ended. It was not material whether his evidence was based on hearsay and gossip when it came to such things as ages and hours of the work of children. Owen at one time before the committee made the assertion that William Sidgwick at Skipton had discharged a number of children under ten years of age from his mills when he learned that the bill was being brought before Parliament. But Owen was refuted in this evidence by the proprietor's nephew, William Sidgwick.⁴ Much stir was also created when Owen testified that many children were employed as young as three and four years old.⁵

At one stage in his testimony, after he had made the astounding statement that he did not think it necessary for children under ten years of age to work, Owen was asked by a member of the committee:

If you did not employ them [children under ten] in any regular work, what would you do with them? A. Instruct them, and give them exercise.

Q. Would not there be a danger of their acquiring, by that time, vicious habits, for want of regular occupation? A. My own experience leads me to say that I have found quite the reverse, that their habits have been good in proportion to the extent of their instruction.⁶

³ See Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, "Report of the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on the State of the Children Employed in the Manufactories of the United Kingdom, 25 April-11 June, 1816," *Sessional Papers*, XVI.

⁴ See *Ibid.*, 381-2, Owen claimed that he received his information from Sidgwick's nephew, William Sidgwick (junior), but the latter denied he had made any such assertion to Owen. In his notes on his interview with Owen, which he read to the committee, there was mention of only one child under ten years of age employed in his uncle's mills at the time of Owen's visit and no mention of children having been discharged.

⁵ See *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶ *Ibid.*

And so it went in this remarkable spectacle before the committee. Owen, representing the new spirit of humanity, found himself opposed by men whose vision was limited to profits. Though a cotton spinner and employer of children, Owen found himself at times unable to talk the language of those in opposition.

The act as passed in 1819 was far away from Owen's original. The age limit was dropped to nine years; the hours of labor for children under sixteen were fixed at twelve hours per day exclusive of meal time; and no adequate provision was made for the act's enforcement.

Indeed, it was to be many a day before Englishmen were ready to end this sacrifice of their children. As late as 1832 evidence was given before the Committee on Factory Children's Labour that now makes us shudder. A certain Samuel Coulson testified before the committee:

At what time in the morning, in the brisk time, did those girls go to the mills?

In the brisk time, for about six weeks, they have gone at 3 o'clock in the morning, and ended at 10, or nearly half past at night.

What intervals were allowed for rest or refreshment during those nineteen hours of labour?

Breakfast a quarter of an hour, and dinner half an hour, and drinking a quarter of an hour.

Was any of that time taken up in cleaning machinery?

They generally had to do what they call dry down; sometimes this took the whole of the time at breakfast or drinking, and they were to get their dinner or breakfast as they could; if not, it was brought home.

Had you not great difficulty in awakening your children to this excessive labour?

Yes, in the early time we had them to take up asleep and shake them, when we got them on the floor to dress them, before we could get them off to their work; but not so in the common hours.

Supposing they had been a little too late, what would have been the consequence during the long hours?

They were quartered in the longest hours, the same as in the shortest time.

What do you mean by quartering?

A quarter was taken off.

If they had been how much too late?

Five minutes.

What was the length of time they could be in bed during those long hours?

It was near 11 o'clock before we could get them into bed after getting a little victuals, and then at morning my mistress used to stop up all night, for fear that we could not get them ready for the time; sometimes we have gone to bed, and one of us generally awoke.

What time did you get them up in the morning?

In general me or my mistress got up at 2 o'clock to dress them.

So that they had not above four hours' sleep at this time?

No, they had not.

For how long together was it?

About six weeks it held; it was only done when the throng was very much on; it was not often that.

The common hours of labour were from 6 in the morning till half-past eight at night?

Yes.

With the same intervals for food?

Yes, just the same.

Were the children excessively fatigued by this labour?

Many times; we have cried often when we have given them the little victualing we had to give them; we had to shake them, and they have fallen to sleep with victuals in their mouths many a time.⁷

Others testified to the appalling effects of the long hours of work on the bodies of the young children. Many suffered from crooked legs and spines together with other deformities. Such was the terrible price England paid for her industrial supremacy.

Owen's experience with Parliament in the Factory Act of 1819 served in a measure to shatter his faith in the possibility of reform through Parliamentary action. Owen writes in his autobiography:

At the commencement of these proceedings I was an utter novice in the manner of conducting the business of this country in parliament. But my intimate acquaintance with these proceedings for the four years during which this bill was under the consideration of both houses, opened my eyes to the conduct of public men, and to the ignorant vulgar self-interest, regardless of means to accomplish their object, of trading and mercantile men, even of high standing in the commercial world. No means were left untried by these men to defeat the object of the bill, in the first session of its introduction, and through four years in which, under one futile pretence and another, it was kept in the House of Commons.⁸

Owen complained that Sir Robert Peel yielded to the "clamour of the manufacturers." He also tells in his autobiography how the opponents of the measure sought to discredit his evidence and the bill by sending a scandal hunter to New Lanark. Out of it came charges of treason brought before the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth.

⁷ Bland, Brown, and Tawney, comp. and ed., *English Economic History Select Documents*, 510-512.

⁸ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 116.

It appears that a delegation armed with damaging testimony gained an interview with Sidmouth. The leading witness against Owen was the Reverend Menzies, a clergyman of Lanark. The Home Secretary asked Menzies to state his charges against Owen :

I have to state [Menzies declared] that on the first of January last, at the opening of what he calls a New Institution for the Formation of Character, to which all his people and the neighbouring gentry were invited, he delivered one of the most extraordinary, treasonable, and inflammatory discourses that has ever been heard in Scotland." "Indeed!" said Lord Sidmouth. "And you were present and listened attentively to the whole of what he said?" "No, my lord,—I was not present; but my wife and family were, and several ministers living in the neighbourhood, and the gentry near." "And you know all the address contained?" "I know from the report of my wife and others that it was most treasonable and inflammatory." "Is this all the charge you have to make against Mr. Owen?" "Yes, my Lord." Lord Sidmouth then asked the deputation (and he appeared fully conscious of the animus of this proceeding,) whether they had any further accusation to make. "No, my lord, we have no other charge to make." "Then I dismiss your complaint as most frivolous and uncalled for. The government has been six months in possession of a copy of that discourse, which it would do any of you credit to have delivered, if you had the power to conceive it." And he bowed them out.⁹

Though Owen is the sole authority for this tale, it is not at all improbable that the incident actually occurred. It was widely known that Sidmouth was on the alert for evidence of seditious meetings and utterances, and this fact led Owen's enemies to wait on the Home Secretary. It also seems probable that Sidmouth answered them in the way reported, because Owen had frequently called upon him and satisfied him that his plans were peaceful and nonrevolutionary.

Although the Factory Act was far and away from Owen's dreams, he had, nevertheless, broken through the line of resistance to social legislation. Others tore through the hole he made, until England came to accept in full the principle that the state should be guardian over the helpless. He had indeed awakened the conscience of England.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

CHAPTER IX

THE WHOLE WORLD

THE YEARS had marched down to 1818. They had been filled with incredible activity for Owen. The little boy who had traveled with strangers in the coach to the great city of London, the little shop assistant with the long nose, had become a world figure. His triumphs at Lanark made him "the celebrated Mr. Owen" to statesmen, clergymen, and social philosophers. But his reports and lectures, filled with the spirit of tremendous change, drew from the privileged ones of the earth exclamations of doubt and fear. Some said his success at Lanark had made him a little mad. All said his plans were impracticable. However, such words of doubt never penetrated the bright armor of truth that protected him.

Owen had by this time ceased to be a man of business. New Lanark saw him only occasionally. He still kept his position as manager and partner in the mills but carried on most of his business by correspondence. He was now a great propagandist interested in the salvation of the world.

After 1815 Owen was a public figure. He was constantly addressing meetings, writing letters to public officials, and sending articles to newspapers. These activities carried him beyond the practical realities of life. He lost touch with solid experience and began to dream dreams.

He sent, or, if permitted, carried, his essays and printed material to every prominent person. J. Q. Adams, while in London as American minister to England, received Owen one Monday morning in June of 1817. Adams wrote in his *Memoirs* of receiving "a pamphlet and several newspapers, containing an exposition of what he [Owen] calls a new view of society; some project like that of the Moravian fraternity of Herrnhut—a community of goods and of industry—projects which can never succeed but with very small societies and to a very contracted extent. Mr. Owen, however, seems to think that it is of universal application, and destined to give a new character to the history of the world."¹

¹ III, 551-552.

Adams was scientifically minded enough to be interested and to give Owen a hearing. He met him again in America when Owen was trying to win the young republic to his philosophy.²

Owen found in Francis Place a good friend but never a convert to his views. It is true, however, that Place helped him with his essays and articles and on one occasion sent a copy of the essays to Bonaparte in exile. Owen wrote an enthusiastic letter to the radical tailor telling him that "you have anticipated my wishes by sending a bound copy of the essays to Buonaparte. I think he will find them of use in his new situation and exalt him to discover a 'New View of Society.'"³

In his *Life*, Owen declared that he met Sir Neil Campbell at a dinner in London. Sir Neil had been British commissioner at Elba and told Owen how he had there been shown a copy of the essays by General Bertrand, aid to Bonaparte. The former emperor had sent Bertrand to Campbell to see if he knew the author of them. This, according to Owen, proved that Napoleon had read his work. Owen also declared that he learned subsequently that

Buonaparte had read and studied this work with great attention, and had determined on his return to power, if the Sovereigns of Europe had allowed him to remain quietly on the throne of France, to do as much for peace and progress, as he had previously done for war, and that this was the cause of his letters to the Sovereigns of Europe on his return, containing proposals for peace instead of war. But they knew not, and did not believe, that he had changed his views and was sincere in his declaration.⁴

Such was Owen's faith in the power of his ideas—a faith that cast out all fear and doubt.

Owen now decided to spread his views to the Continent and to visit some of the new schools he had heard about. Up to this time, 1818, he had been tremendously active—building and directing the school at New Lanark, writing essays and endless papers, making speeches, and interviewing ministers of the government. His continental tour was not undertaken, however, with the idea of securing a rest from his labors but probably with a view to promoting the great cause in other countries.

² See below, chap. X.

³ Letter of Robert Owen to Francis Place, July 6, 1816, in *Place Manuscript Collection*, No. 37949, MSS. This letter to Place was dated as above, but by that time Napoleon had been defeated at Waterloo and was on his way to St. Helena.

⁴ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 112.

Owen was accompanied by Professor Pictet, a Genevan scientist, who introduced him to many notables in Paris. Owen was particularly gratified with his interview with the French prime minister. In writing years later of his visit to the minister, he took pains to explain how much he was honored. The prime minister at leaving had not only accompanied Owen to the door of his own office but followed him through the second room and at length bade him good-by at the third door. This procedure, Owen learned, was followed only in case a visitor was to be signally honored. "And in this manner was the inexperienced cotton-spinner initiated into the so-called great ways of the great world."⁵

It must be mentioned that the "inexperienced cotton-spinner" had been given an interview with the Duke of Orleans. The Duke apparently treated Owen with that easy, offhand familiarity so characteristic of him. He explained to Owen how he must be careful in his utterances because the reigning family, the Bourbons, was jealous of him and watched him closely.

There were many more interviews and meetings with famous people: La Place, Alexander von Humboldt, and the Duke de la Rochefoucault. Owen was apparently delighted with the honors shown him. He must have thought that he now was one of the great ones of his time. Perhaps he did not always discriminate between the language of courtesy and sincerity.

Owen's visit to Father Oberlin's school at Fribourg is interesting. Of course Owen took the opportunity to tell the good father what he had done for education at New Lanark:

I told him the plan which I pursued was a very simple one, and was obtained by a close and accurate study of human nature, not from books, (for these were very generally worse than useless,) but from the infant, child, youth, and man, as formed under a false fundamental principle, as was evident by the entire past history of the human race. To form the most superior character for the human race, the training and education should commence from the birth of the child; and to form a good character they must begin systematically when the child is one year old. But much has been done rightly or wrongly before that period. From that age no child should be brought up isolated. . . . These children [one to three years of age], to be well trained and educated, should never hear from their teacher an angry word, or see a cross or threatening expression of countenance.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

And so Owen laid down some of his principles to Oberlin, who, according to Owen, was much impressed. But the good priest could not quite understand how Owen managed without resort to punishment. "I told him the secret was in the first division of the infant school, from one to three," Owen explained, "in which school the affections of the children were secured to their instructors; and that when their affections are obtained, the children will always with pleasure to themselves exert their natural powers to their utmost extent."⁷

From Owen's account of his talk with Oberlin, it is apparent that he did not altogether convince the priest that human nature could be changed so easily.

Owen and his friend, Pictet, also visited Pestalozzi at Yverdun. Owen thought Pestalozzi's school a step in advance of the ordinary schools. But the famous schoolmaster did not teach the children anything of utility, anything to help them earn a living; nor did he give any attention to their habits and dispositions. These were Owen's observations on the great Pestalozzi, who means so much in the history of education.

But of Fellenberg, Pestalozzi's pupil, Owen had more praise. Fellenberg was conducting a school at Hofwyl, and to this place Owen and Pictet journeyed. It is apparent that this master fell more readily into Owen's groove than either Oberlin or Pestalozzi; for, before Owen left the establishment, he had agreed to send his two sons, Robert Dale and William, to Hofwyl. It must be remembered that this school was conducted for the education of children of the upper classes, and no doubt this influenced Owen's decision. In time his two sons went to Hofwyl as Owen planned.

It was now approaching the time for the meeting of the Congress at Aix-la-Chapelle. Owen turned away from visiting schools and meeting scientists to take advantage of the great gathering of rulers to place his plan before them. First of all, he made for Frankfort on the Main accompanied by one of his New Lanark partners, John Walker, who acted as Owen's interpreter. The German Diet was meeting in Frankfort, and the city was crowded with diplomats and representatives of the German states. Emperor Alexander, Metternich, Hardenburg, Capo d'Istria, Gentz, and the great Jewish bankers, including the Rothschilds, Parish, and Beth-

⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

man, were present. Owen was armed with letters of introduction from Englishmen to many of the notables. Nathan Rothschild had given him a letter to Bethman, which Owen used and which won him an invitation to a most elaborate dinner given by Bethman on September 7, 1818. It was at this dinner that Owen met Gentz, secretary to the Congress of Sovereigns, and held a somewhat extended debate with him on the "Social System." In his autobiography, Owen declares that the dinner itself was staged for the express purpose of giving Bethman's guests, members of the German Diet, an opportunity of hearing Owen debate with Gentz on the "New Social System." But apparently this discussion which Owen thought so interesting to members of the Diet was not so regarded by Gentz, who wrote in his *Tagebücher*: "*Diskussion mit dem langweiligen Owen.*"⁸ According to Owen:

The conversation was soon so directed as to engage the secretary [Gentz] and myself in a regular discussion, to which the others were attentive listeners, and in which they were apparently much interested.

As the discussion proceeded from one point to another, I stated that now, through the progress of science, the means amply existed in all countries, or might easily be made to exist on the principle of union for the foundation of society, instead of its present foundation of wealth, sufficient to amply supply the wants of all through life. What was my surprise to hear the reply of the learned secretary! "Yes," he said, and apparently speaking for the governments, "we know that very well; but we do not want the mass to become wealthy and independent of us. How could we govern them if they were?"⁹

Owen declares that this remark of Gentz's opened his eyes to the enormity of the task ahead of him. But this conversation did not deter him from going on with his resolution to present a memorial to the Diet.¹⁰ It is not improbable, however, that Gentz was merely talking to shock Owen.

Owen waited in Frankfort until the Diet was over, but he received no word that his memorial had been considered at all. In the memorial Owen had not given any details of his plan, but he had merely called attention to the great advance made in the new mechanical power and at the same time the growing improverishment of labor. It was the everlasting paradox of starvation in the midst of plenty that he propounded to the Diet. In all probability

⁸ II, 261.

⁹ Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 183.

¹⁰ See *The Times* (London), October 9, 1818.

those who glanced at the memorial put it down as the work of a crank and speedily forgot it.

It was at Frankfort that Owen met Alexander, who by this time was passing through a period of disillusionment destined to lead him toward reaction. Gentz wrote after the Congress at Aix-la-Chapelle, "*Das die Revolutionärs aber am Kaiser Alexander Keine Stütze finden werden, das ist jetzt zum Trost der Bessern, und zum Heil der Welt vollständig erwiesen.*"¹¹

Owen, learning that the Emperor intended visiting a kinsman, the Prince of Tour and Taxis, who was staying at Owen's hotel, resolved to approach the Emperor with his memorial. Therefore, as the Emperor was leaving the hotel, Owen stepped out and offered him the paper. Alexander, according to Owen, was unable to find a pocket for so bulky a package and consequently handed it back to Owen with very evident annoyance manifest in his words: "I cannot receive it—I have no place to put it in. Who are you?" Owen replied, "Robert Owen," whereupon the Emperor said, "Come to me in the evening at Mr. Bethman's. . . ."¹²

Owen was very much hurt at the Emperor's peremptory manner and accordingly did not see him at Bethman's. He declared that he afterwards regretted this, because Alexander was naturally kindhearted and of course tremendously influential. And so he never had an interview with the Emperor, who no doubt, mystical as he was, would have been attracted to Owen's philosophy.

In due course Owen, with countless other reformers and witch doctors, marched on Aix-la-Chapelle hoping to gain the ears of those who had the power. It was the custom to prepare a formal memorial or address on any subject to be set before the Congress. Owen had done so, and he entrusted his two memorials to Lord Castlereagh, who promised to present them to the Congress. There seems to be some ground for belief that Alexander read the memorials but did not give Owen an interview as he did Thomas Clarkson and Lewis Way.¹³ Clarkson was at Aix-la-Chapelle in the interests of the negro slaves and the abolition of the slave trade, while Lewis Way was asking for equality for the Jews in Europe.

Owen had a right to expect some consideration from the Em-

¹¹ Friedrich von Gentz and Adam Müller, *Briefwechsel zwischen F. Gentz und Adam Müller*, 270.

¹² Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 185.

¹³ See *The Times* (London), October 23, November 6, 1818.

peror. It must be remembered that his brother Nicholas visited Owen at New Lanark. Also, his sister, the Grand Duchess of Oldenburgh, once spent two hours in London listening to Owen expound his principles. At the end of the time, she promised to explain his views to the Czar.¹⁴

Joyneville, in his *Life and Times of Alexander I*, declares that Alexander saw Owen at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle and "entirely shared" his peace principles.¹⁵ But it seems improbable that Owen would have met him and not have mentioned it in his *Life*. There is every reason to believe, however, that the Emperor read something of his plans; for when William Allen visited Alexander in 1819, he wrote in his diary:

He [the Emperor] said he had read a little of Robert Owen's plans, and soon saw to what they would tend, and his opinion of them was precisely the same as ours.¹⁶

The Times correspondent at Aix-la-Chapelle wrote home that it was Owen's intention to ask the sovereigns and ministers to journey up to Scotland and examine his experiment at New Lanark. "Whether the Sovereigns will choose to adopt it, and place themselves at the head of villages instead of empires," the journalist continued, "I shall not pretend to divine; though my opinion is that Mr. Owen will not succeed better at Aix-la-Chapelle in proselytising their Majesties, than the Quaker did who went to Rome to convert the Pope."¹⁷

The Times had now ceased to take Owen seriously and in an editorial had this to say about his idealism: "If Mr. Owen is a single man, (and if married, perhaps he might be allowed two wives), why can he not marry Madame Krudener? they seem to be birds of a feather: the ex-King of Sweden might give away the bride, and the Abbé de Pradt perform the ceremony."¹⁸

This playful sally at Owen was supplemented a few days later by another article more sarcastic in tone:

The celebrated reformer of New Lanark, Mr. Owen, is quite nonplussed at the conduct of the Congress. The Allied Ministers are holding conferences and discussing international questions without once asking his advice, or requir-

¹⁴ See Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 146-147.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁶ William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, I, 363.

¹⁷ *The Times* (London), October 9, 1818.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

ing his assistance; though, as he justly observes, had they made his plan the preliminary subject of deliberation, they might have saved themselves much diplomatic embarrassment, and rendered Congress, as it has been nick-named by the Germans, a *comfress* (*Kom fress*) or mere convivial party¹⁹

The "Memorial to the Allied Powers Assembled in Congress at Aix-la-Chapelle" was preceded by one addressed "To the Governments of Europe and America." Both memorials emphasized the great increase in mechanical power and the necessity of adopting measures to make the vast possibilities for increased production available to all. Of course Owen would be glad to explain just how this could be done. In the "Memorial to the Allied Powers . . ." he was more explicit in stating the case for an economic order out of balance. He gave figures indicating that Great Britain's productive powers in 1817 had increased over twelve times that of 1792.²⁰

It is interesting to note that Owen took pains to emphasize the practical nature of his plan and that he was no "visionary." He also wrote of New Lanark as a "colony" and gave the impression that some other kind of productive system prevailed at the mills than one of individualism.²¹

In the treaties and their protocols which were drawn up by the Congress, there was not one word to indicate that Owen's memorials had even been considered. Yet Owen declared that a French minister told him in Paris that his memorials were looked upon as the most important documents presented to the Congress.²²

It was all vain striving, however, and Owen early sensed it. He was soon back in England ready for more meetings, more committees, where he might herald the dawn of a new day for England.

Those troubled years rolled on. The poor remained poor. William Allen made journeys to New Lanark to see that infidel Owen had not utterly uprooted Christianity among the people in his charge. The committee under the presidency of His Highness the Duke of Kent finally dissolved without raising the money to start a community. The Duke himself, so kindly disposed toward Owen, died suddenly, leaving behind the infant Victoria and many creditors, including "Mr. Owen." A committee of three gentlemen from

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, October 23, 1818.

²⁰ See Robert Owen, "Memorial to the Allied Powers Assembled in Congress at Aix-la-Chapelle . . .," *Life*, by Robert Owen, I, 212-222 (Appendix O).

²¹ See *Ibid.*

²² Robert Owen, *Life*, I, 186.

Leeds, headed by Edward Baines, visited New Lanark and reported favorably on what they saw to the Guardians of the Poor at Leeds. Owen stood twice for Parliament but failed each time and learned something of the ways of pocket boroughs.

Though Owen was being rapidly pushed into outer darkness by the great interests he had so particularly offended, he still was able to command public attention. Early in 1820 the County of Lanark requested Owen to make a report on ways and means to relieve the public distress. Owen responded with his famous "Report to the County of Lanark. . . ." Here he laid down his economic principles with greater detail than ever before. He dealt with the arguments of the Malthusians but certainly not to the satisfaction of the followers of Malthus. He saw in spade husbandry the possibilities of unlimited agricultural production, and, most significant of all, he laid down the labor theory of value that labor is the source of all value and should therefore be the measure of value.

At the start of his report, Owen set forth his position by giving the following as the basis of his economic doctrine:

1st.—That manual labour, properly directed, is the source of all wealth, and of national prosperity.

2nd.—That, when properly directed, labour is of far more value to the community than the expense necessary to maintain the labourer in considerable comfort.

3rd.—That manual labour, properly directed, may be made to continue of this value in all parts of the world, under any supposable increase of its population, for many centuries to come.

4th.—That, under a proper direction of manual labour, Great Britain and its dependencies may be made to support an incalculable increase of population, most advantageously for all its inhabitants.

5th.—That when manual labour shall be so directed, it will be found that population cannot, for many years, be stimulated to advance as rapidly as society might be benefited by its increase.²³

Owen then went into the problem of distribution of wealth. He argued that every addition to scientific productive power brought increased wealth, but under the existing system there was no way to market the goods created by the new productive power. What was to be done? Owen's answer was not what might be expected from one who had attacked the principle of private property. He

²³ Robert Owen, "Report to the County of Lanark, of a Plan for Relieving Public Distress and Removing Discontent . . .," *Life*, by Robert Owen, I.A., 263-320 (Appendix S).

did not advocate the socialization of the means of production and distribution but came out for replacing gold and silver as standards of value by "human labour." It was his way of escape from the dilemma with which England was faced—tailors and bakers, mill hands and butchers, eager to produce goods but unable to bring about the exchanges. David Ricardo, his skeptical friend who looked very much askance at "Mr. Owen's schemes," had inadvertently lent support to them. He had propounded a theory of value that was identical with Owen's, but naturally he was not prepared to endorse Owen's theory of a currency based simply upon labor.

After having delivered himself of his new money doctrine, Owen then proceeded to develop his ideas of spade husbandry. On the basis of experiments conducted by William Falla of Gateshead, Owen stood ready to discard the plow in favor of the spade. Falla had been able practically to double the yield of wheat by the use of the spade at a cost of five shillings an acre more than that of the plow.²⁴

It was a curiously backward step for Owen to take. He who stood for so much that has come to pass advocated a technique in agriculture that seems primitive indeed. Time has done nothing to justify his position. But he was driven on by the necessity of finding a temporary means to employ the poor and at the same time to satisfy the arguments of the Malthusians, who foresaw scarcity of food in Owen's plans.

Though there was much of spade husbandry in the report—and that seems at first to have caught the fancy of the committee of the county,—Owen lost but little time in getting down to his more fundamental ideas for the reorganization of society. Once more he presented his cooperative villages laid out in the form of a parallelogram with the inhabitants working harmoniously at agricultural tasks supplemented by small manufacturing. The villages were to be composed of 300 to 2,000 persons, depending upon the amount of land to be cultivated. The people were to be fed in common dining rooms; individual kitchens were to be done away with as uneconomical. Private apartments were to be provided for the adults, but the children, while under instruction, were to have separate quarters.

²⁴ See *Ibid.*

Struck by the utility and simpleness of the Roman manner of dress and the dress of the Highlanders of Scotland, Owen planned that his villagers should be similarly attired. He thought it a step in the direction of economy and physical well-being. Perhaps he did not realize the opposition that might develop from the feminine portion of his villagers.

He went on to explain his plans for the education of the children, for the superintendence of the various enterprises, and for the governance of the villages. Owen's ideas on government did not run along democratic channels. For instance, he declared that villages founded by "landowners and capitalists, public companies, parishes, or counties, will be under the direction of the individuals whom these powers may appoint to superintend them, and will of course be subject to the rules and regulations laid down by their founders."²⁵

But the communities formed by the middle class and working class were to be self-governing. "Their affairs should be conducted by a committee, composed of all the members of the association between certain ages—for instance, of those between thirty-five and forty-five, or between forty and fifty."²⁶

Owen's optimism was at times truly boundless. Writing of these working-class associations, he declared :

As all are to be trained and educated together and without distinction, they will be delightful companions and associates, intimately acquainted with each other's inmost thoughts. There will be no foundation for disguise or deceit of any kind; all will be as open as the hearts and feelings of young children before they are trained (as they necessarily are under the present system,) in complicated arts of deception. At the same time their whole conduct will be regulated by a sound and rational discretion and intelligence, such as human beings trained and placed as they have hitherto been will deem it visionary to expect, and impossible to attain, in every-day practice.

The superior advantages which these associations will speedily possess, and the still greater superiority of knowledge which they will readily acquire, will preclude on their parts the smallest desire for what are now called honours and peculiar privileges.²⁷

Owen, carried on by a vision, just could not see any depravity in human nature. The people in these middle- and working-class associations would be so well trained and contented that they would not interfere with the honors and privileges of the higher orders.

²⁵ *Ibid.*²⁶ *Ibid.*²⁷ *Ibid.*

Major Torrens, and other economists before him, had asked Owen to explain how his communities were to stand with respect to the outside world where an individualistic economy prevailed.²⁸ Were they to live isolated economically from competitive society, or were they to carry on trade with it? Torrens pointed out that if they did sell their goods in the general market they would find themselves subjected to all the evils incidental to the competitive order. They would be at the mercy of price fluctuations and good and bad business—bugbears which Owen promised to eradicate. If they chose to be self-supporting, then they would find their costs of production much higher than the outside world, because they would not be able to effect the division of labor that would be possible in a more complex society.

These were difficult problems to deal with and perhaps not to be solved without making the communities much more extensive at the start than Owen planned. However, Owen set to work on these objections by arguing that great economies could be made in production by eliminating all the wastes so characteristic of competitive enterprises. People could be fed and clothed much more economically. The absence of selfishness and irrational behavior would make possible a surplus of products. This surplus might be exchanged with other establishments of a like nature which were sure to be started. Then too, Owen hoped for the creation of a labor standard of value, "and as there will always be a progressive advance in the amount of labour, manual, mental, and scientific, if we suppose population to increase under these arrangements, there will be in the same proportion a perpetually extending market or demand for all the industry of society, whatever may be its extent. Under such arrangements what are technically called 'bad times,' can never occur."²⁹

Owen saw nothing in the formation of his associations that would interfere with ordinary activities of the general government. In fact, he declared that courts of law, prisoners, and all the machinery for taking care of wrongdoers would not be required. Further-

²⁸ See "Mr. Owen's Plans for Relieving the National Distress," *Edinburgh Review*, XXXII, 453-477 (October, 1819). This article was not signed by Major Torrens, but it was obviously written by him. The arguments and phraseology were his.

²⁹ Robert Owen, "Report to the County of Lanark, of a Plan for Relieving Public Distress and Removing Discontent . . .," *Life*, by Robert Owen, IA, 263-320 (Appendix S).

more, his system of physical education would be the best training to make good soldiers to defend the country, but this did not mean that Owen condoned war. "Men surely cannot with truth be termed rational beings until they shall discover and put in practice the principles which shall enable them to conduct their affairs without war."³⁰

And so Owen laid before the county of Lanark his plan for curing the economic sickness that spread over the land. But the gentlemen of that county expressed mild interest only in spade husbandry, one of the "more practical parts" of the program.³¹

The "Report to the County of Lanark" now passed on into history. It was Robert Owen's answer to the cries of the hungry; but those who were well fed and well clothed merely intoned the creed of Malthus. And so in England the poor starved in the midst of plenty. The report takes its place alongside other great dream-worlds fabricated out of a longing to show men the way to live the life of reason.

The poor in Ireland were also starving. And so "Mr. Owen," not the least cast down by his failure to establish a single community in Britain, sailed for Ireland in 1822. He determined on making a tour of the country before he made any proposals or held any meetings. Accordingly, he spent many weeks in the company of Captain Macdonald and an agricultural expert studying conditions in the country. He was very well received by the nobility and people of consequence. He wrote home to Mrs. Owen giving an account of his interview with the Lord Lieutenant, a visit to the Duke of Leinster, and the prospects of a stay with Lord Cloncurry.³² There were more letters to her all filled with the spirit of exuberance for the success of his plans for Ireland.

On March 1, 1823, Owen wrote a letter to the nobility, gentry, clergy, and inhabitants of Ireland dilating upon the richness of the soil and other natural resources of the country. He declared the island able to support a much larger number than seven millions, its present population. But at the same time, he found the most terrible distress prevailing in all parts of the country. This poverty, he declared, was due to the wrong system under which the Irish

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See *ibid.*

³² See letter, October 31, 1822, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

people worked. And so he promised that on March 18, 1823, at the Rotunda in Dublin he would reveal to the people his plan of salvation for them.

The great day came with Owen ready to reveal the secret. All the pride and chivalry of Ireland were gathered in the Rotunda that day.

"From an early hour in the day," a witness related, "equipages blocked up the different entrances to the Rotunda, and the Round Room was as crowded as we have ever seen it on any former occasion with ladies and gentlemen. Among the company were—the Duke of Leinster, the Earl of Meath, Lord Cloncurry, the most Rev. Doctors Troy and Murray, the Surgeon-General, the Duchess of Leinster, Lady Rossmore, &c. &c. A great portion of the room was railed in for the accommodation of Ladies, but this space was found inadequate to contain the number present, and some of the remote benches consequently vied in brilliancy with the selected spot.

"At a quarter-past twelve o'clock, the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor took the Chair, amid loud applause."³³ Then "Mr. Owen" entered and was received with much enthusiasm.

Owen settled down into reading a paper which took three hours. He pointed out all the errors of the old system of society and then drew a rosy picture of the promised land under the "New System." Of course he could not resist the opportunity to hurl a challenge at the clergy. He begged them to answer such questions as these:

Are the inhabitants of the world agreed, or divided, upon the subject of religion?

Are the divisions on the subject of religion created by nature, or by instruction?³⁴

At the conclusion of his address, Owen moved that the meeting be adjourned to April 7. But the clerical gentlemen in the vast audience, being much offended at Owen's antireligious remarks, took occasion to block this move for adjournment to a later date and moved that the meeting adjourn *sine die*.

The Reverend Dunne, who moved this amendment, declared that he preferred seeing the peasantry "residing in their own cottages"

³³ "Meeting at the Rotunda," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 145-147 (February 8, 1826).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153-155 (February 8, 1826).

than in Owen's "barracks." And then he went on to speak of Owen as "so visionary in his ideas, that at times he appeared not to consider himself as a mortal of this world, and sometimes he seemed scarcely to think that he would be immortal in another. . . ."³⁵

This sally was met by boos and hisses; whereupon Dunne retaliated by declaring that the disapprobation expressed toward him came from a flock of geese. This brought about much noise and confusion. The audience after sitting patiently for three hours was now in a restless mood. But Dunne went on with more objections to Owen: "The system recommended by Mr. Owen would go to cut the sacred tie between landlord and tenant, and dissolve the distinctions between rich and poor."³⁶

There was more from Dunne in the same vein, and then other clergymen arose to protest against Owen's system. The Reverend Singer "called on them not to sacrifice their Bible to Mr. Owen's pamphlet, nor their Redeemer to Mr. Owen's metaphysics."³⁷

Owen had indeed aroused the clergy to bitter opposition, thereby providing good entertainment for the audience but doing little for his cause. However, there were other meetings equally well attended by the aristocracy; and, though Owen did not speak as long as three hours, there was no lack of resistance from his enemies, the clergy. In the end the meetings came to nothing; although Owen brought into being the Hibernian Philanthropic Society, an organization that held a meeting and raised money. It was reported that the secretary's table was covered with bank notes, but the total was not enough to launch one of Owen's communities. And so the curtain fell upon the Irish episode.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169-171 (February 22, 1826).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER X

THE ADVENTURE MAGNIFICENT

TO ENGLAND OWEN had preached the gospel of the New Moral World, but England had received him not. Now came new hope from America. Off on the banks of the Wabash stretched the fertile lands of the Rappites. These pious followers of Father Rapp had made a garden spot of southwestern Indiana. Living as a community, but practicing celibacy, they accepted as law the decrees of their leader. And now, for reasons known only to himself, Rapp commissioned George Flower, his agent, to find a buyer for the great tract under his rule. Flower met Owen and laid before him the proposition of buying Father Rapp's empire. Owen was at once impressed and made plans to journey to America.

America lay before him—a land of dazzling hope—living supremely in tomorrow. What finer field could he find to build his dream world? Indeed, the America of the 'twenties was a land without equal in the history of civilization. Here lay whole empires of virgin soil, ready for the ax and plow of the pioneer. Yet much already had been done by a people abounding in energy and filled with such a spirit of hope and confidence that they paused before no obstacles. The Mississippi and beyond had been reached by the advance guard of an army of settlers whose dreams comprehended the conquest of the continent itself.

With such vast and splendid material opportunities unfolding, what possible place could one find for a coöperative society founded upon the common ownership of property? Indeed, individualism appeared to be running riot, and justly so in a land so primitive and little bound by custom. Yet so strange is the paradox of life that never in so short a space—the span of years stretching from the advent of Owen to the Civil War—have ever arisen more utopian schemes to solve men's spiritual and material needs.

From the Rhine Valley pietistic sects bent on an ideal way of life came to the New World. Mennonites, Shakers, Quakers, Moravians found in America the lure for a life more abundant. For decades they poured into the promised lands. And others came dreaming dreams of spiritual and economic freedom.

Perhaps this accounts for the great outpouring of idealism which came in Owen's day. While the great philanthropist struggled to make men over at New Harmony, Joseph Smith was giving to the world the message from the golden plates. A little later, Brook Farm flowered out into an association after the plan of Fourier. The Fox sisters made contact with the other world. Horace Greeley opened the columns of the *New York Tribune* to every new idea carried along by the winds of freedom.

Not only was America swarming with sects and ideas, but travelers landed daily in New York and Philadelphia drawn on by the attraction of a young republic trying an experiment in self-government. They were not deterred by stories of crowded inns with bug-infested beds or daunted by the tales of roads that were bottomless pits.

Many made their way into the South and marveled that men should be slaves in the land of the free. The Englishmen who came were shocked at the uncouthness displayed by their cousins of the frontier. But all were impressed by the pride exhibited by Americans in the achievements of the republic.

Accompanied by his son, William, and Captain McDonald, Owen landed in America in the fall of 1824. Owen's fame had preceded him to America. He was known as the successful cotton manufacturer philanthropically inclined, with a record of having transformed New Lanark into a model town. Some inkling of his heresies had reached the ears of ministers of the gospel, but he was everywhere received as a distinguished personage. By this time, Owen had turned into a prophet possessed of but one idea: his new social system. In every possible place, on a packet boat, in an inn, or in a public assembly, Owen preached the gospel of the New Moral World. Listeners he was never without. Young and old, unsophisticated and those who were skeptical, all gave him ear.

A day by day account of Owen's movements after reaching America is given in his son William's diary. It appears that the father was anxious to see some of the religious communities in action. After having landed at New York, Owen and his party took a steamboat up the river to Albany. From that place, armed with a letter from DeWitt Clinton, they journeyed seven miles to the Shaker colony at Waterwitch. What they saw in this religious

colony was simple-minded people working industriously—spinning, weaving, carpentering, and all the work characteristic of an agricultural community on a plane of economic self-sufficiency. Owen took every opportunity to question them on their methods and at the same time let it be known that he too was about to launch a community. "When my father talked of establishing communities," William Owen's diary reads, "they asked: of Quakers? or Jews?., or what? and shook their heads when they found it was for all sects."¹

They had other ideas of the requirements for a successful community.

While walking down a hill which commands a beautiful view of Albany and the river [William Owen continued,] we met two shakers returning with goods in a couple of carts. We told them we were much pleased with what we had seen, upon which one asked if we would like to remain with them. We said we would make some communities still better than theirs and that they would come to see us. He asked if we forbid marriage. We said no. He replied then you can't agree; there will be continual quarrels.²

After visiting the Shaker colonies, and viewing the newly completed Erie Canal, Owen and party took passage down the river. From New York they proceeded by stage and by boat to Philadelphia.

It may be interesting to note that while in Philadelphia Owen was subjected to some high-pressure salesmanship on the part of Flower, who, it must be remembered, had been commissioned to dispose of the Harmony settlement by the Rappites. "Mr. Flower said he had written to his son to buy Harmony himself," William Owen entered in his diary, "if he did not arrive before a fixed day, I think the 20th December. Mr. Stuckman, a druggist, called and said he knew several individuals ready to join a community both here and at Pittsburgh."³

It was while in Philadelphia that Owen met Madame Fretageot, a French woman conducting a school for William Maclure in Philadelphia. Maclure was a wealthy philanthropist with a scientific interest in geology and a great penchant for industrial education. Madame Fretageot was at once delighted with Owen's

¹ William Owen, "Diary of William Owen. From Nov. 10, 1824, to April 20, 1826," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, IV, 7-134.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

plans for a community at "Harmonie." After meeting Owen, she wrote at once to Maclure, who was with his school in Spain :

You have no idea what pleasure I felt when I was talking by the side of a man whose actions and principles are so much in harmony with mine. When he said that children must be taken just when born in order to write in those blank papers but what is correct, I felt an increase of desire to arrive at that period in my life when as much by economy and the help of friends, I shall be able to put in practice that project of taking little babies, who will be absolutely mine. When he entered in my house, I took his hand, saying, There is the man I desired so much to converse with! and you are, said he, the woman that I wish to see.⁴

A short time later, Madame Fretageot was in New Harmony filled with enthusiasm for Owen's principles. She was still with Maclure, for he had early returned to America and thrown in his lot with Owen at New Harmony. Maclure assumed the burden of managing the schools in the community, while Madame Fretageot taught the children.

From Philadelphia Owen pushed on to Washington, where he arrived November 25, 1824. Visitors at the capital were not so numerous in those days; therefore, Owen was cordially received by the notables of the day. John Quincy Adams, the President-elect, and Secretary of the Treasury Crawford both listened patiently while Owen divulged his scheme for the redemption of America. But he did not stay in the city long at this time. Harmony was now calling him for the great adventure.

Accompanied by his son, William, who wrote down in his diary the temperatures morning and evening, Owen struck off across the mountains toward Pittsburgh. It was an interesting and revealing journey to both father and son. William was much impressed by the democratic manners of the landlords in the inns, who shook hands with them at meeting and parting. He also did not fail to note that his father talked a great deal with the ladies they met on the way. And the steamboats intrigued him, as might be expected; for William had a young man's interest in things mechanical. He marveled at the fine appearance of the boats and their number on the river at Pittsburgh; but evidently their engines left much to be desired; for he found the escaping steam from the boiler very disagreeable.⁵

⁴ Extracts from Letters of Madame Marie Duclos Fretageot, 1820-1833.

⁵ See William Owen, *op. cit.*

In Pittsburgh they met Father Rapp, head of the Rappites. Owen talked with him for a long time and, as might be expected, sought to convert that venerable mystic to the religion of the New Moral World. If we are to believe William, his father succeeded. For after Owen had paused in his explanations of the principles, Father Rapp declared he had often exclaimed to himself, "My God! is there no man on God's earth who has the same opinions as myself and can help me in my plans? I am now lucky to have come in contact with such an one."⁶

Father Rapp was apparently a good salesman and therefore not inclined to disagree with his prospective customer. He also took an early opportunity to explain why he wanted to leave the Wabash. He declared that the climate did not agree with Germans; but seeing that Owen was disturbed by the information, he hastened to add that "the English and Americans found it quite healthy." He went on and explained that he had done as much at Harmony for himself and the neighborhood as he could possibly hope to do, and now a new location seemed desirable.

After this talk with Father Rapp, Owen and his son visited Economy, which was a short distance from Pittsburgh and the place selected for the new home of the Rappites. It was while there that young Owen met a man named Sutton, who gave him some interesting information on the Rappites. "He told me," William set down in his diary, "that men and women who are married sleep together; yet Rapp's power is so great as to conquer nature. One had, contrary to agreement, got a son by his wife. He expected to be turned off, but Rapp said 'he might have done much worse.'"⁷

In a short time they were once more in Pittsburgh, and from there they took a steamboat for the Wabash. They were three days and sixteen hours traveling to Louisville. The boat stopped many times for passengers and for cordwood to burn in the boilers. Owen was always ready, as usual, to explain his system to anyone who would listen. Nor did he lose any opportunity to make the acquaintance of people living along the shore when the boat stopped for wood. William Owen wrote of such an occurrence:

A little before breakfast we made for the Ohio shore in order to take in wood. We found a boat with four or five cords in it. These cost \$1.25 and \$1.50

⁶ *Ibid.* ⁷ *Ibid.*

each While this was being taken on board, we went to a small cottage standing on a high bank, surrounded by a little cleared land, with fine sycamore trees in front. We found there 3 females in a very neat house. One in particular seemed to catch my Father's fancy.⁸

And so they sailed down the beautiful Ohio to the land of great adventure. Owen, wrapped up in his splendid dreams, saw little of the constantly shifting scenes of cabins in pioneer clearings and ugly little towns planted along the banks of the river.

On December 15, Owen and his party reached Mt. Vernon, Indiana, from where on the next day they started out for Harmony. William described the journey overland in his diary:

We walked several miles and my Father accompanied a woman on horseback for some distance and had a good deal of conversation with her. She said she got many things from Harmony, but did not like the place because marriage was prohibited. He also talked to two women who were washing by the roadside, called Polly and Sallie French. We saw a flock of turtle doves, some beautiful woodpeckers with red heads, etc. and a number of grey squirrels in the woods. We were some time in Harmonie lands before we were aware of it. During the whole distance, the land was rolling, as it was called, and presented a fine appearance. A few miles before we reached the town the soil became dryer, more sandy and lighter and the character of the woods also changed. The beech, ironwood, etc. disappeared, giving place to more white and other oak. After travelling about 15 miles, we came about 2 o'clock in sight of the town, lying below us about a mile off, on an extensive bottom cleared to a good distance, which ended near where we stood in undulating hills on which the vineyards stood.⁹

They were now in Harmony, the village of the Rappites. There lay before them the fruits of many years of plodding industry. By incredible toil, the peasants under the business leadership of Frederick Rapp, adopted son of Father George Rapp, had cleared thousands of acres of fertile land and raised magnificent crops of corn and wheat. They had built mills to weave cotton and woolen cloth. Their distillery made excellent whisky, which they never drank but sold to their less abstemious neighbors. They had built two churches, one a frame structure standing across the street from the large brick home of the spiritual leader. Next to the frame church stood another more imposing church built of brick in the shape of a Maltese cross.

Many travelers visited the village before the coming of the Owens. Some of their accounts are more graphic than William

⁸ *Ibid.* ⁹ *Ibid.*

Owen's somewhat mechanical and scientific description of what he saw. George Flower, one of the founders of an English settlement in Illinois, wrote of the place as he saw it in 1819:

A large portion of the land included in the estate was of the best quality, between two and three thousand acres being under cultivation and fenced. The town consisted of several brick and frame two-story houses for the use of small families, all built after one model, with ample gardens, well fenced and neatly cultivated, and a vast number of log cabins, neatly kept. There were also five or six very large buildings, three stories high, which contained the community families, of sixty to eighty individuals each. Rapp had a brick mansion, a large building, with a granary of the most solid masonry, and a large brick church, itself a curiosity, the plan, it is said, having been given to Mr Rapp in a dream. There were four entrances to the church, closed by folding doors; the doors were about one hundred and twenty feet from each other. The upper story was supported by twenty-eight pillars of walnut, cherry, and sassafras, the walnut pillars being six feet in circumference, and twenty-five feet high; the others were twenty-one feet high and of proportionate circumference; a surprisingly large building for this country. . . ¹⁰

The Rappites had created by their cooperative industry a marvelous degree of material well-being. Not only did they have an abundance for themselves, but their surplus wheat, corn, and pork brought in a steady flow of money. When they left Harmony their money chests carried to the flatboats were the talk of the countryside. While these followers of Father Rapp were envied because of their comforts and wealth, they were looked upon with contempt by their neighbors, who regarded them as superstitious and ignorant vassals of their leader. Indeed, Father Rapp was no believer in enlightened education for his people, and he never missed a chance to fortify their simple faith by tricks. For instance, he managed to secure a flat stone with human footprints carved on it, and these he represented to be the prints of the angel Gabriel's feet.

Common religious faith was the cement that held the Rappites together. Father Rapp held to the principles of what he believed to be primitive Christianity. Celibacy was enforced as a leading article of their faith. As in so many other pietistic groups, sex was looked upon as the cause of the fall of man. But they were always faced with the problem of how to keep up their numbers.

¹⁰ *Letters from Illinois*. . .

These Württemberg peasants that formed the community at Harmony were no exception to the rule. They were constantly compelled to seek converts to keep their population large enough to man their industries and till the fields.

It is difficult to determine just why Father Rapp left Harmony. It will be recalled that he told Owen that the climate was not favorable to his Germans, but the evidence available points to other causes. It is true, however, the death rate was very high when they first started the community at Harmony in 1815, but in the last year of their stay only two persons died. Robert Dale Owen thought that Rapp grew uneasy as he watched his followers gain more leisure—leisure to think and perhaps become restless under his absolute authority. He then determined to move in order to keep them occupied with pioneer activities.¹¹ In any case, 30,000 acres of land were for sale, and Owen was ready to buy.

As soon as Owen had actually accomplished the purchase of Harmony, he was anxious to be off on a tour of speaking and preaching the new gospel. In February of 1825, he was back in the city of Washington interviewing Adams, the President-elect, and Monroe, the President. While in the city, he delivered two long discourses on his New System of Society, before a distinguished assembly of representatives, senators, the President-elect, and the President himself.¹²

We have the authority of John Quincy Adams that on the second discourse Owen held his audience for three hours, during which he read largely from a book, probably his essays.¹³ He emphasized as usual the influence of external circumstance upon the formation of character. He held his social teachings up to his listeners as the "universal religion of human nature":

This universal religion, as I trust it will speedily become, is therefore justly called rational religion; its base is simple truth, and it defies what man, through error, can do against it. For this rational religion, now for the first time declared amidst this enlightened assembly, composed of the most distinguished men of this country within its metropolis and within its capitol, I, as a citizen of the world, claim for it the full and complete protection which the American Constitution freely offers to mental and religious liberty

¹¹ See Robert Dale Owen, *Threaded My Way*, p. 210.

¹² The second discourse was delivered in March of 1825, one month, or thereabouts, after the first discourse.

¹³ John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, VI, 524.

I claim this protection, however, not with the slightest feeling of hostility to a single individual of the human race; my intention is to do them good—to relieve them from the error and evil by which they are now on all sides beset; and my sole object in thus claiming protection for this new religion, is to introduce into practice, and permanently secure, peace and good-will among all mankind, by destroying the selfish, and establishing the social system.¹⁴

The *National Intelligencer* declared that the three-hour discourse was “listened to with great respect and attention.”¹⁵ One Congressman who attended gave his opinion that Owen’s scheme was not applicable to America on a large scale, but it might be made to work in isolated cases.¹⁶

Not only was Owen well received at the capital by the President and the President-elect, but Jefferson and Madison each entertained him for several days. Of course we have only Owen’s statement for the enthusiasm with which he was greeted by these two political sages.

About the time of Owen’s arrival in America in October of 1824, a Cornelius Camden Blatchly, an Owen sympathizer, had sent a pamphlet to Jefferson, probably a copy of Owen’s *New View of Society*. Jefferson, then eighty-one years old, wrote a long letter dated October 22, 1824, to Blatchly:

Sir. I return thanks for the pamphlet you have been so kind as to send me on the subject of commonwealths. Its moral principles merit entire approbation, its philanthropy especially, and its views of the equal rights of man. That, on the principle of a communion of property, small societies, may exist in habits of virtue, order, industry and peace; and consequently, in a state of as much happiness as heaven has been pleased to deal out to imperfect humanity, I can readily conceive, and, indeed, have seen its proofs in various small societies, which have been constituted on that principle; but I do not feel authorized to conclude from these that an extended society, like that of the United States, or of an individual state, could be governed, happily on the same principle.

I look to the diffusion of light and education, as the resource most to be relied on, for ameliorating the condition, promoting the virtue and advancing the happiness of man. That every man shall be made virtuous, by any process whatever, is, indeed, no more to be expected than that every tree shall be made to bear fruit, and every plant nourishment—the briar and bramble can never become the vine and olive—but their asperities may be softened

¹⁴ Robert Owen, *Two Discourses on A New System of Society; as Delivered in the Hall of Representatives of the United States...*

¹⁵ March 7, 1825.

¹⁶ See the *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), March 21, 1825.

by culture, and their properties improved to usefulness in the order and economy of the world. And, I do hope, that in the present spirit of extending, to the great mass of mankind, the blessings of instruction, I see a prospect of great advancement in the happiness of the human race, and that this may proceed to an indefinite, although not to an infinite, degree. Wishing every success to the views of your society, which their hopes can promise, and thanking you most particularly for the kind expression of your letter towards myself, I salute you with assurances of great esteem and respect,

THOMAS JEFFERSON.¹⁷

Age had not dimmed the clear vision of Jefferson; nor had time broken his faith in the possibility of human betterment.

Madison, also far in years, was interested in Owen's experiment; but his criticism of it showed less of philosophical detachment, so much a part of Jefferson's thinking. Madison's opinion of Owen's schemes is given in a letter written to Nicholas P. Trist. After discussing other matters, Madison proceeded to a discussion of Owen in particular. He observed that the disordered economic conditions in Great Britain furnished an opportunity for Owen to present his panacea, but he declared that "Such diseases are however too deeply rooted in human society to admit of more than—great palliatives."¹⁸ He went on to illustrate how crop failures might bring about increased prices of food stuffs without raising wages and that wages might even be reduced in such a contingency. He mentioned also the increase of labor-saving machinery as a cause of unemployment and distress. Madison was impressed with the "caprice of fashion" as a cause of economic distress. "Take for a sufficient illustration a single fact," he wrote to Trist. "When the present King of England was Prince of Wales, he introduced the use of shoe-strings instead of shoe-buckles. The effect on the condition of Buckle-makers was such that he received addresses from many thousands of them praying him as the arbiter of fashion, to save them from starving by restoring the taste for Buckles in preference to strings . . ."¹⁹

Madison apparently was not mindful that while buckle makers might lose out, shoelace makers would prosper.

The loss of foreign markets for one cause or another he thought a cause of depression in an industrial and commercial society be-

¹⁷ In *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, CCXXIII.

¹⁸ April, 1827, in *Papers of Nicholas P. Trist*, IV.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

yond the control of men. Then Madison gave a very solid argument against Owen's latest panacea :

Mr. Owen's remedy for these vicissitudes, implies that labour will be relished without the ordinary impulses to it; that the love of equality will supersede the desire for distinction; and the increasing leisure, from improvements of machinery, will promote intellectual cultivation, moral enjoyment and innocent amusements, without any of the vicious resorts, for the ennui of idleness. Custom is properly called a second nature. Mr. Owen makes it nature herself. His enterprize is nevertheless an interesting one. It will throw light on the maximum to which the force of education or habit can be carried; or like Helvetius' attempt to shew that all men came from the hand of nature perfectly equal, and owe every intellectual or moral difference, to the education of circumstance; though failing of its entire object, that of proving the means to be all sufficient, will tend to a fuller sense of their great importance ²⁰

Madison had still another argument against Owen's plan—an argument he used directly with Owen when the latter visited him. He invoked the Malthusian doctrine of population to show how hopeless the case was for the working classes :

Even Mr. Owen's scheme with all the sweep he assumes for it, would not avoid the pressure in question [pressure of population on food]. As it admits of marriages, and it would gain nothing by prohibiting them, I asked him, what was to be done after there should be a plenum of population for all the food his lots of ground could be made to produce. His answer was that the earth could be made indefinitely productive, by a deeper and deeper cultivation. Being easily convinced of this error, his resort was to colonization, and vacant regions—But your plan is to cover, and that rapidly, the whole earth with flourishing communities. What then is to become of the increasing population? This was too remote a consideration to require personal attention, an answer prudent, if not conclusive.²¹

Truly Malthus had conquered the world of thought. Here was Madison in far-off America—a land of unpeopled wildernesses—putting up a front against reform and basing it on Malthus. Time has proved Owen more nearly right than Madison. In all the dark days of recent economic depressions, we have never once heard the cry that we are overpopulated, though more than a century has elapsed since Madison and Owen sat together talking social reform.

The newspapers and journals in America at this time took more than passing notice of Owen's discourses. The comment was on the whole favorable, for little notice was taken at the start of his

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

religious heresies. The interest he aroused was partly due to his reputation for philanthropy and wealth and partly due to the novelty of the community idea he advocated.

A reviewer of Owen's *Two Discourses*, writing in the *Cincinnati Literary Gazette*, commented:

As in every other theme of great interest, a diversity of opinion prevails upon the practicability and utility of his plans—according to the knowledge, prejudices and judgment of those who form them.—But, upon the whole, the general impression is not unfavorable; and the newspapers, those great vehicles of public sentiment, have generally treated Mr. Owen and his scheme with respect, and offered their good wishes for his success. This is, perhaps, more than he could have expected, considering how many classes of society are attacked by his system;—the influential,—the ambitious,—the wealthy,—the litigious,—the idle,—the sectarian, &c.; who will be arrayed in opposition to its practical operations, whenever they perceive its success, and become afraid of the contagion of universal equality, freedom, virtue, and happiness.²³

While in Washington during the early spring of 1825, Owen not only spoke twice in the House of Representatives but issued a manifesto announcing that "a new society is about to be formed at Harmony in Indiana." He invited all those who were in sympathy with his ideas to join him in the enterprise, which was to be called New Harmony.

Straightway there tramped toward New Harmony the mentally lame, halt, and blind as well as others. Nothing could have been more fatal to Owen's plans. A small hand-picked group of socially minded people might have made the experiment possible, but Owen's optimism knew no bounds. The whole of the United States lay within his grasp, and so he marched on without the slightest hesitation.

By April he was back in New Harmony ready to launch his society and the New Moral World. The followers of Father Rapp had departed, taking their gold with them but leaving behind their well-built houses and their public buildings together with their plants for the manufacture of woolen goods, candles, beer, whisky, leather, and, in fact, the means for supplying a frontier community with almost all the articles which were required at that time.

²³ III, 155 (May 14, 1825).

The *New Harmony Gazette*, official organ of the new community, early published a description of the town at the time of the opening up of the new society :

The village is regularly laid out in squares, forming four streets, running north and south, and six running east and west: the whole included in six wards, containing 35 brick, 45 frame, and about 100 log buildings, occupied for various purposes. Some of the buildings are spacious and costly, the principal of which are the Town Hall, the Church, the Mansion House, formerly occupied by Mr. Rapp, the Public Store and Manufactories, the Boarding School, and several large boarding houses for the accommodation of the members of the Society.²³

From the account given in the *Gazette* as well as the complaints made by William Owen and others, it was evident that the mills and the manufacturing plants suffered from lack of skilled workers to man them. The town filled up all too quickly with people who were idlers and mere talkers, leaving no room for those who might have carried on the substantial part of the enterprise.

Into this milieu came Owen that spring of 1825. The Wabash, lately swollen by spring rains and melting snow, was settling back into its channel. The damp meadows steaming in the warm sunshine were fairly popping with vegetation. Wild flowers, grass, and volunteer corn and wheat pushed through the warm rich soil. In the wooded lots, wild turkeys and pigs scampered about. Indeed, the swine left behind by the Rappites soon ate up the village gardens, while Owen's followers debated over constitutions and discussed the fundamentals of a rational society.

When Owen arrived, the village was packed with eager enthusiasts anxious to partake of the benefits of a society where poverty and ignorance were to be no more, where their children were to be given such an education as the philosophers had only dreamed about.

The first step was to organize a preliminary society. All eyes turned to Owen, whose boundless confidence and benevolence had won the hearts of everyone. His address to the assembled Utopians in the old Rappite meeting house was characteristic :

I am come to this country, to introduce an entire new state of society; to change it from the ignorant, selfish system, to an enlightened, social system,

²³ I, 22 (October 15, 1825).

which shall gradually unite all interests into one, and remove all cause for contest between individuals ²⁴

Owen, smiling benevolently upon the listening multitude, went on to explain the blessings of the new social system, not forgetting to expound his gospel of the all-determining character of circumstance in shaping the lives of individuals. And then in recognition of the selfish habits that his disciples may have acquired in a perverse and irrational world, Owen gently suggested that they must live in a "halfway house" before they would be able to enter the mansion of the New Moral World:

New-Harmony, the future name of this place, is the best halfway house I could procure for those who are going to travel this extraordinary journey with me; and although it is not intended to be our permanent residence. I hope it will be found not a bad traveler's tavern, or temporary resting place, in which we shall remain, only until we can change our old garments, and fully prepare ourselves for the new state of existence, into which we hope to enter. It is, however, no light thing for men and women of all ages, to change the habits to which they have been accustomed from infancy; and many difficulties must be at first encountered, and many struggles with our old feelings while the work of regeneration shall be going forward; but these contests with our old habits and feelings will be of short duration; and I trust that even these struggles may be made useful to ourselves and to others ²⁵

After these remarks, Owen warned his hearers that, contrary to his feelings, there must exist at the outset "a certain degree of pecuniary inequality. . . ." But this would be only for a time, after which all would be on a plane of perfect equality.

Owen explained to his eager listeners how he had journeyed to Washington and had laid his plans before the general government and how, in order to test the truth of his principles, he had put them to the "fiery ordeal" of a public presentation so that all men might be free to criticize. "Until I had thus, in the most public manner I could devise," he told his neophytes, "openly and honestly declared my sentiments, and published them, I did not agree to accept of a single family or individual; for I would, if possible, have no one deceived, in any manner, who shall be admitted into our new association."²⁶

²⁴ "Address Delivered by Robert Owen, of New-Lanark . . .," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 1-2 (October 1, 1825).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

The preliminary constitution was then presented by Owen, but no action was taken on it until May, 1825, when it was adopted and the Preliminary Society came into being.

The fundamental principles involved in the constitution were unmistakably set forth. The society was "formed to improve the character and condition of its own members, and to prepare them to become associates in Independent Communities, having common property."²⁷ The members were all to be equal in rank, that is, as nearly equal as possible.

The affairs of the society were to be handled by a committee, all of whose members were to be named by Owen. But in actual practice, Owen named only four members of the committee, leaving the rest to be elected by the community.

Each family was to have a credit at the community store for necessary goods. It appears that the maximum for a member was placed at \$180. Women were not regarded as members and received no credit unless they did work for the society.²⁸

The constitution provided for the best possible education of the children of the members. Indeed, the schools, as at New Lanark, came to be the chief feature of the place.

Although Owen was not sympathetic with religious teaching and practice, he laid down the principle that complete liberty of conscience and worship were to be maintained.²⁹

There was little or nothing in the constitution that could be criticized, except perhaps that a realist might say it left far too much independence of action to the members.

Thus the society was launched, Owen beaming and smiling approval at the ardent zeal of his followers. There can be no question about his ability to inspire people. Thomas Pears, one of the Owenites, wrote thus of Owen:

You will perhaps smile at this but I have just returned from hearing Mr. Owen, and I am then always in the hills. I do not know how it is,—he is not an orator, but here he appears to have the power of managing the feelings of all at his will. The day before our arrival here, the report of the com-

²⁷ "The Constitution of the Preliminary Society of New-Harmony; May 1, 1825," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 2-3 (October 1, 1825).

²⁸ See letter of Thomas Pears to Benjamin Bakewell, June 2, 1825, in *An Adventure in Happiness Papers of Thomas and Sarah Pears*, pp. 13-14. Hereafter this work will be cited as *Pears Papers*.

²⁹ See "The Constitution of the Preliminary Society of New-Harmony; May 1, 1825," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 2-3 (October 1, 1825).

mittee of which I send you a copy, was made public; and when all found the credit they possessed to be very small, dissatisfaction prevailed. A day or two after, Mr. Owen spoke, and it vanished.³⁰

Owen stayed on at New Harmony but a little over a month after the formation of the Preliminary Society and then started back to Scotland to bring his family to Indiana. He was gone from the early part of June to the following January. And this was a very critical time in the life of the young community. But as time went on, Owen found it increasingly difficult to remain in any one place. He was everlastingly giving lectures and holding meetings. Apparently the everyday business of administering an organization did not have the appeal that the lecture platform held.

³⁰ Letter of Thomas Pears to Benjamin Bakewell, June 2, 1825, in *Pears Papers*, p. 13.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAD UTOPIANS

SUMMER CAME rolling down on the disciples of the New Moral World—summer, hot and humid, bringing great clouds of mosquitoes from the Wabash. The pigs grunted and rooted unchecked. The boys and girls of the “New System of Society,” now entirely the creatures of circumstances, ran wild while their elders, exercising the inherent perversity of human nature, found fault with one another.

It was not strange that they found fault with one another from the very start; for they were a most heterogeneous crowd drawn from all walks of life. And as the venture moved along through the months to 1827, the contrasts in personalities and cultures became even more marked. There were Thomas Pears and his wife, Sarah, coming from good substantial upper-middle-class stock. Both were idealistically inclined with strong intellectual interests. William Pelham, formerly postmaster at Zanesville, Ohio, wanted to spend his declining years in an atmosphere of mental liberty, so he said. Virginia Dupalais, an aristocratic young woman, came to seek forgetfulness after an unhappy love affair. There were backwoodsmen too, who were used to pork and hominy and very few restraints. Later there arrived on the “Boat-Load of Knowledge” such a company of talent as seldom has been seen. Scientists and scholars they were, but not very good material for a community based upon equality.

Trials and tribulations came fast on the heels of Owen's departure for England. The committee left in charge faced growing discontent. In the first place, the maximum of \$180 a year for a family was considered too little. Thomas Pears wrote back to Pittsburgh:

The Good Folks, as you call us, are not satisfied with their allowance, and indeed it is impossible they should be, as it will not support them; and alterations are therefore continually making therein by order of the Committee, either for special sums, or for a certain per centage on the stated allowance; which being partial cannot give satisfaction.¹

¹ Letter of Thomas Pears to Benjamin Bakewell, September 2, 1825, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 24-29.

Pelham, in his letters home, explained how the business of caring for the needs of the members was organized :

As to dollars & cents, they are words seldom heard any where but in the public store, which is like all other trading shops, differing however in this, that every head of a family or single unmarried member unconnected with a family, instead of carrying money to the store, is furnished a Pass-book in which he is charged with what he buys, and is credited every week with the amount of his earnings. These pass-books exhibit a curious medley of items, bacon, chickens, eggs, melons, cucumbers, butter, tea, sugar, coffee &c &c with all the varieties of *store goods* on the debit side, while on the other are placed the credits of the individuals. I have been several days employed in overhauling and balancing these pass-books (the clerk whose particular duty it is, being sick) and this has given me the opportunity of making these observations, which indeed anyone may do who will take the trouble of looking over them, for they are open to the inspection of all who choose to examine them. There are about 300 of these pass-books continually in motion.²

Though there was complaint about the allowances for maintenance, there was enough to eat at New Harmony; the rich "Mr. Owen of New Lanark" had seen to that. But housing conditions were bad. Often two and three families were compelled to live in one house. Such an arrangement was not conducive to the sweet accord that Owen preached.

In that first fateful summer of the colony's existence when the fields should have been made to produce an abundance of wheat, corn, and vegetables, little or nothing was raised. As Thomas Pears wrote, "The hogs have been our Lords and Masters this year in field and garden." But the hogs were not altogether to blame for the barren fields. There were no hands to plow and cultivate. Each thought the other lazy, with the result that little effort was made to raise a crop. It was as Thomas Pears wrote to Benjamin Bakewell:

Please tell Mr. Thomas [Thomas Bakewell] that I do not think the men generally do work as well as they would for themselves. Many do, but not the majority I think. The accounts are complicated. There are now five in the counting room, and the books not up³

Pears wrote that the factories had not produced enough to pay expenses and that the community would do well to pay expenses

² Letter of William Pelham to William Creese Pelham, September 7, 1825, in selections from *Letters of William Pelham, written in 1825 and 1826. Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, pp. 368-373.

³ September 2, 1825, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 24-29.

the next year. He was writing in the early fall of 1825 after the enterprise had been going for several months. But like many of the other utopians, he hoped that all would be well when the "Master Spirit" returned from England.

Even as early as that first summer of the community at New Harmony, the note of religious discord entered into it. There were many Methodists and Baptists in the ill-sorted group that made up the inhabitants. They were grievously hurt by the skeptical attitude of the more intellectual members. Preachers were allowed the use of the church to give their sermons, but it was stipulated that they must be willing to stand the fire of questions and criticism at the end.

From Pelham's letters to his son, one gets the feeling that the air was charged with religious controversy. He wrote of meetings—everlasting meetings—in the church to which the interested were summoned by the ringing of the bell. He sneered at the clergymen who were the speakers on these occasions. And he was full of praise for the discourses of Robert L. Jennings, a very liberal young man educated as a clergyman, who answered these orthodox preachers.

It was not very long before New Harmony had a reputation all over America for atheism. Stories were told of blasphemy and immorality. In the *Western Luminary* appeared the following comment taken from the *Western Recorder*:

A Monstrous Misnomer.—A gentleman of the first respectability, writes from Illinois to a friend in Philadelphia, that Mr. Owen's new settlement, Harmony, has increased in numbers to 1150 men; and adds that it is "as sad an assemblage of infidels and atheists as ever was collected." There is no worship among the Harmonists—vice, profaneness and infidelity will increase of course, and to our own feelings it seems that this establishment, which is the professed offspring of infidelity, can be considered in no other light than that of a moral experiment made with such combustible materials as shall at length produce a tremendous explosion, like that of a second France in miniature. Good will doubtless come out of it, but what will become of the experimenters!⁴

The eastern newspapers were filled with comments and letters having to do with Owen's great experiment at New Harmony. The general opinion seemed to be that Owen had gathered together a crowd of unbelievers, who were leading a life of utter freedom

⁴ II, 540 (March, 1826).

from ordinary moral restraints. Cursing and blasphemy were reported to be the rule. And many declared that "children curse their schoolmaster with impunity."

Stories were circulated that free love prevailed at New Harmony. It was natural that loose sexual relations should be linked to religious skepticism. Many people argued that inasmuch as the bars were down on belief in the Bible as the inspired word of God, they were also removed on conduct between men and women. One mother with three daughters at New Harmony wrote in alarm to William Maclure, who was then staying there, inquiring about the morals of the place. Maclure took pains to reassure her that all was well:

I don't believe there is a place in the United States, or in any other country where the married are so faithful, or the young so chaste for the best of all reasons—the bribe to abuse is taken away, by all the cares, anxieties, and troubles, of matrimony, and a family of children, being entirely removed, and providing for them.⁵

Though frequently denied, such reports were, nevertheless, believed. And they served to attract the most undesirable elements to New Harmony. Owen was to blame for the situation. He came with a message of skepticism to a frontier people whose intellectual food was the Bible interpreted by preachers with a flair for sermons breathing hell-fire and brimstone. Sex was a subject reserved for vulgar men and boys who loafed about livery stables. In polite society or in any mixed social group, no word would be tolerated that suggested in the most remote degree the biological facts of sex.

Early in the fall the utopians launched a journal, the *New Harmony Gazette*. R. L. Jennings and William Pelham served as editors in the early days of its publication; later, Robert Dale Owen and Fanny Wright gave it a unique character. Essays on philosophical and educational subjects fill its pages, but the everyday life of New Harmony is not disclosed. The squabbles that never ended so long as New Harmony lasted as a community can only be surmised by reading the *Gazette*. Perhaps its motto gives us the best clue: "If we cannot reconcile all opinions, let us endeavor to unite all hearts."

As the weeks passed, the committee's problems grew and grew until it was caught in a web of utter ineffectiveness. The mills and

⁵ *American Mercury* (Hartford, Connecticut), October 17, 1826.

workshops were without hands, food became scarce, the shiftless marched in, and living quarters became crowded. Sarah Pears wrote despairing letters home, while William Pelham, immensely pleased with the "mental freedom," urged his son to join. Indeed, the social life was delightful. Every Tuesday evening was given over to dancing and Friday evenings to music. But such frivolity scandalized the pious.

Young William Owen, with a strong practical sense, was toiling to bring order out of the chaos. He was much disturbed over the scarcity of skilled labor and wrote a long letter to his father in December of 1825 asking for tradesmen, but at the same time he warned his father "*that we have no room for them.*"⁶

Owen received this letter as he landed in America the second time. He paid scant heed to the warning about the lack of room; for he soon assembled a great group of educators to accompany him to New Harmony.

Expectation hung on his return to the community. The many who were troubled in heart over the growing anarchy found comfort in the prayer, "He will set all aright when he comes back to us." And so they set their faces toward the east and waited. Meantime, the frost stilled the whining voices of the mosquitoes, the Harmonists gathered their scant crops, the hogs fattened on the apples and acorns, and the merrymakers danced and sang in the great Rappite church.

During this time, Owen, having cut loose from New Lanark, embarked on the packet ship "New York" with his son, Robert Dale, for America. He was now crusading to make America the New Jerusalem of rationalism. While the ship cut through the wastes of the Atlantic, Owen was busy framing a message for the Americans.

After reminding the people whom he intended to save that their soil and climate was rich and varied and their government free, he proceeded to point out their shortcomings:

It is true you have derived many advantages from your European ancestors, but it is equally true that you have transplanted a very large portion of their errors and prejudices; you cannot therefore, enjoy to their full extent, the benefits to which I refer, until these errors of the old world shall have been removed

⁶ December 16, 1825, in Collection of Letters from William Owen to Robert Owen, MSS.

The greatest and most lamentable of these are the notions: that human nature has been so formed as to be able to believe and disbelieve, and to love and hate, at pleasure, and that there can be merit or demerit in believing or disbelieving, and in loving or hating.

These false notions are the origin of evil, and the real cause of all sin and misery among mankind; yet they are received and continued in direct opposition to every fact known to the human race.⁷

These were bold, hard words to throw at a young, self-confident people. But Owen, the messiah, was equal to anything that might redeem the Americans from their sinful ways. They were also impolitic words. The pulpit and press resented them, especially when they were leveled against revealed religion. In those days before science had shaken religious faith and superior entertainment had cut into the attendance of religious exercises, the church occupied a position that no one could safely assault.

Once back in America, Owen took every occasion to proclaim his message and thereby draw the fire of the defenders of the faith.

Among the many journals which took issue with Owen on his religious views was the *United States Literary Gazette*. Shortly after his return to America, it published a criticism of his gospel of reason:

He tells us that he has devoted much time to the study of books relating to the history, constitution, and necessities of human nature;—but in what language have the books been written, which do not teach that man never was nor ever will be governed by reason alone; that a knowledge of the right way is not always a sufficient inducement to pursue it, that the affections and passions are the master springs of human actions; and that a system which does not touch these, is useless and worse than useless? One book at least, he cannot have studied, and that is—the Bible.⁸

Before Owen started for New Harmony, he held meetings in Philadelphia, where he preached his doctrine of "circumstance" and attacked the idea of man's depravity. Straightway he drew upon him the fury of those who believed that man was conceived and born in sin. One Friday evening in Philadelphia just before Owen began his lecture, a note was handed him asking that he state explicitly his position on man's depravity. The writer of the note wanted to know whether Owen's system with all its emphasis on

⁷ "Mr. Owen's Address to the Citizens of the United States," *Niles Register*, XXIX, 175 (November 12, 1825).

⁸ II, 65 (April 15, 1825).

circumstance could be carried out if mankind was now in a "lapsed and fallen state" due to original sin."

Owen had no choice but to come out boldly and expose his skepticism to his audience. Many were so horrified that they left the hall when he declared the Bible was no more the word of God than other writings. A number of listeners loudly applauded, and some shook their heads most vehemently.

Letters and editorials appeared in the *New York Observer* and other journals ridiculing Owen's philosophy of circumstance and deploring his infidelity. The columns of the *National Intelligencer* were for some weeks during the early part of 1825 devoted to the Owenite controversy. Many of those people friendly to him wrote letters to the paper defending Owen for his courage. One writer declared that numerous statesmen who believed the same as Owen were afraid to come out and boldly state their opinions as Owen had done.¹⁹

In all the wordy controversy over Owen, little or nothing was said about his economic heresies. Perhaps it was not clear in the minds of people who heard him or read his discourses just what his economic ideas meant. In any case he was appealing to people who listened to doctrinal sermons and read their Bibles with great industry; therefore, they were ready to seize upon his remarks that bore a religious flavor.

While Owen preached the new crusade to make America rational, William Maclure, already attracted to Owen through a visit to New Lanark and by Madame Fretageot's letters, came to America ready to lend his name and throw his fortune in on the side of Owen. The agreement entered into by these two philanthropists was apparently not too clearly understood by them. It appears that each was to put \$150,000 into the enterprise at New Harmony, but financial misunderstandings soon arose and came to be the cause of much ill-feeling.

Owen entrusted Maclure with the management of the educational program at New Harmony, and so the latter drew about him a group of scientists and teachers of no ordinary ability. There was Thomas Say, a zoölogist of note who was destined to do some very important work in natural science in New Harmony. Another

¹⁹ See the *Western Luminary*, II, 389-390 (December 28, 1825).

²⁰ See the *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), April 28, 1825.

scientist to join Maclure was Charles Alexander Lesueur, famous for his work in classifying the fishes of the Great Lakes and for his researches in botany. Gerard Troost, a Dutch geologist, also joined the group. These men, together with a talented group of teachers, assembled at Pittsburgh late in 1825 for the journey to New Harmony.

Maclure built a keelboat at Pittsburgh and prepared for the trip down the Ohio. The boat was given the name "Philanthropist." And on December 8, 1825, though the winter season was far advanced, he together with Owen and the "Boat-Load of Knowledge," as his talented colleagues were styled, pushed off for the promised land.

Owen, accompanied by his son, Robert Dale, was now keenly anxious to reach New Harmony. Time and time again the ice stopped the progress of the boat, while the merry crowd on board sang songs of the "Land of the West" they were soon to reach. But Owen was impatient with their slow progress and finally left the boat some time before it reached the junction of the Wabash. He started overland, making all possible speed for New Harmony, where he arrived January 12, 1826.¹¹

Children and adults marched out to greet the man who was regarded by them as their savior. Owen beamed upon them in his best philanthropic manner. There were music and speeches of welcome. "All will be well now," they called out to one another. "He has come back to us."

Strangely enough Owen was delighted with what he saw and heard. He took steps immediately to organize a permanent society and cut short the period of probation. On January 25, 1826, a meeting was held of the Preliminary Society, and it was resolved to organize a Community of Equality. Such blindness to existing conditions became increasingly characteristic of Owen's behavior. He was now plainly tripping along quite airily among the clouds. Even his son, Robert Dale Owen, was surprised at his father's optimism:

I think my father must have been as well pleased with the condition of things at New Harmony, on his arrival there, as I myself was. At all events some three weeks afterwards, he disclosed to me his intention to propose to the Harmonites that they should at once form themselves into a Community of

¹¹ See the *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 135 (January 18, 1826).

Equality, based on the principle of common property. This took me by surprise, knowing, as I did, that when the preliminary society had been established nine months before, he had recommended that this novitiate should continue two or three years, before adventuring the next and final step.¹²

Now followed the business of constitution making. A committee of seven was chosen by ballot to undertake this work. Many sessions were held, and at length the constitution with the declaration of principles was brought forth. The declaration of principles was lofty enough to suit the most idealistic :

Our Object, like that of all sentient beings, is happiness.
 Our Principles are
 Equality of Rights, uninfluenced by sex or condition, in all adults :
 Equality of Duties, modified by physical and mental conformation :
 Cooperative Union, in the business and amusements of life :
 Community of Property :
 Freedom, of speech and action :
 Sincerity, in all our proceedings :
 Kindness, in all our actions :
 Courtesy, in all our intercourse :
 Order, in all our arrangements :
 Preservation of Health :
 Acquisition of Knowledge :
 The Practice of Economy, or of producing and using the best of every thing
 in the most beneficial manner :
 Obedience to the Laws of the country in which we live ¹³

The principles as enunciated by the committee also reaffirmed the Owenite dogma on the formation of character and the importance of education.

The official name of the community was to be "The New Harmony Community of Equality." In fact, equality was much emphasized in the constitution. That instrument provided for an executive council to carry into effect the laws and regulations passed by an assembly composed of all members of the community above the age of twenty-one years. The work of the community was to be carried on by departments headed by superintendents selected by the members of each department.

In order to become a member of the community, it was necessary to receive the approval of the majority of the members. No person

¹² Robert Dale Owen, *Threading My Way*, pp. 253.

¹³ "Constitution of the New-Harmony Community of Equality," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 161-163 (February 15, 1826).

could be dismissed from the community except by two-thirds vote of the members of the assembly.

There was to be a community of property, but the real estate was to be held in perpetual trust for the community. This meant, of course, that no member on leaving could demand any portion of it.

And so there was launched one of the most idealistic constitutions that men have devised for their own governance. It was brought forth in a frontier country—a country seemingly preoccupied with clearing land and raising crops. It was received with enthusiasm by a people who at the same time enslaved negroes and defended the practice by arguments from the Bible.

It was one thing to frame a constitution and secure its acceptance by the community and quite another to make it work. This might be expected in the affairs of men. But Owen, supposedly a shrewd man of business, thought otherwise. The Community of Equality had to be formed at once.

It is difficult to know just what happened in the few weeks following the inauguration of the constitution. The official paper, the *New Harmony Gazette*, gives little idea of what the specific troubles were that caused the executive council to ask Owen to assume full control of the affairs of the colony for one year. This he did, and for a time all went well. But in the meantime, some of those who had belonged to the Preliminary Society drew off by themselves and formed a new community, Macluria. This secession was prompted not a little by Owen's extreme views on religion; but, nevertheless, he went on with his program of emancipation. A little later still, another community was formed under the name of Feiba Peveli.

A prominent visitor to New Harmony, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach,¹⁴ noted the existence of these two communities other than the parent colony at New Harmony:

No. 2, lies two miles distant from New Harmony, at the entrance of the forest, which will be cleared to make the land fit for cultivation, and consists of nine log houses, first tenanted about four weeks since, by about eighty persons. They are mostly backwoodsmen with their families, who have separated themselves from the community. No. 1, in New Harmony, because *no religion* is acknowledged there, and these people wish to hold their prayer meetings undisturbed. The fields in the neighbourhood of this community were of course very

¹⁴ See below, pp. 120–122.

new. The community No. 3, consisted of English country people, who formed a new association, as the mixture, or perhaps the cosmopolitanism of New Harmony did not suit them; they left the colony planted by Mr. Birkbeck, at English Prairie, about twenty miles hence, on the right bank of the Wabash, after the unfortunate death of that gentleman, and came here. This is a proof that there are two evils that strike at the root of the young societies; one is a sectarian or intolerant spirit; the other, national prejudice. No. 3, is to be built on a very pretty eminence, as yet there is only a frame building for three families begun.¹⁵

Not only did Owen's liberal views on religion serve to upset the calm of some people's minds at New Harmony, but his plan for the education of the young struck at the sanctity of the home.

Sarah Pears in New Harmony wrote to her aunt, Mrs Bakewell, on the subject of the new regulations that went into effect after the formation of the permanent community:

I will now, if I can, give you some account of our new rules and regulations, which have given almost general dissatisfaction. I will now endeavor to give you a statement of facts, and ask you if you think it possible for any mother to be satisfied. I for my part am pretty near out of my senses. It is impossible to express how completely miserable I am, nor how I can sufficiently deprecate my own folly in ever consenting to come so far at such an uncertainty.

In the first place, all our elder children, those whom we expected to be comfort and consolation and support in our old age, are to be taken away from us, at an age, too, when they so peculiarly require the guardian care of their parents; and are to be placed in large boarding houses. The single males and females above the age of fourteen are to live together in one house, over which there is to be one married woman to superintend. I ought rather to have said three houses, as there are three boarding houses; but they are all to be conducted on the same plan, and to be for the sole reception of single males and females.

Instead of our own dear children each housekeeper is to receive two more families, one of which will have a child under two years old. The rest will be at the boarding school. These three families are each to live in community, and take the cooking by turns. We have already got one family with us, but as the people are leaving the Society very fast, I hope it will not be necessary to take a third. If it is, however, I shall prefer going into one of their miserable log cabins to being crowded so thick.



Mr. Owen has been remonstrated with about the impropriety of putting young males and females into the same house, but he says that in six months they will become so used to it that they will not mind it. Can you, my dear Aunt,

¹⁵ Selections from *Travels through North America, during the Year 1825 and 1826 . . .*, II. *Early Travels in Indiana*, selected and edited by Harlow Lindley, pp. 418-437.

conceive of anything so absurd and cruel as breaking up and dividing families in order to make them comfortable? Comfort! Name not the word in Harmony, or at least in the Community of Harmony. And Equality!—it would be a total anomaly!¹⁶

Mrs. Pears was a very unhappy woman, and her husband came to be a much disillusioned man. He wrote home:

I have before given you my opinion of the probability of the Preliminary Society maintaining itself, and I think I once mentioned that I was afraid the second year would produce results similar to the first. Still I hoped that when Mr. Owen returned, all would be so arranged as to ultimately succeed. I admired his abilities, his disinterestedness, and I had confidence in his knowledge of business, and more than half believed in his knowledge of human nature; but "hope deferred maketh the heart sick," and I cannot look forward to another year of difficulty, and I may say distress, with the same light heartedness as I once viewed it. I am tired of the repetitions of: "These measures pursued, in a very short time you will yourselves be astonished at the change for the better which will be produced." We pursue no measures. A "nine days wonder" would be a wonder here.¹⁷

New Harmony was indeed a madhouse in the months that followed the formation of the permanent society and the dictatorship of Owen. The utmost confusion prevailed in all departments. Little cliques formed, accompanied by endless gossiping and whispering. Owen gave lectures and prophesied that all would be well. He drew pictures of the beautiful palaces that were to house them all in the glorious days to come. On one occasion he led a little band of the utopians to a spot outside the town selected to be the site of the buildings for the parallelogram. While the ladies of the community prepared a lunch, the Harmonites laid about them mightily, felling trees to clear the ground for their new home. Songs were sung, and speeches were made. Owen painted a word picture of the New Jerusalem; but the palaces never materialized.

Spring came. The Wabash spread out over the low bottom lands; the earth grew warm and steamy; clouds of mosquitoes hovered over the meadows. "Mr. Owen" tripped from meeting to meeting, his face radiant with benevolence. Every day one or two families left for Mt. Vernon by road or waited for a boat to take them back to Pittsburgh, or Boston, or Philadelphia. Sarah Pears found that

¹⁶ March 10, 1826, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 70-74.

¹⁷ Letter of Thomas Pears to Benjamin Bakewell, March 21, 1826, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 75-79.

it was unnecessary to take more families into her home, and her daughters were allowed to stay with her for the very plain reason that the boarding schools were not ready. In fact, nothing appeared to be up to specifications and time.

The social life, however, was not neglected. There were balls, concerts, lectures, and even weddings. Owen, with his passion for regulation and innovations, brought forth a new rational costume for men and women. Sarah Pears wrote:

The female dress is a pair of undertrousers tied round the ankles over which is an exceedingly full slip reaching to the knees, though some have been so extravagant as to make them rather longer, and also to have the sleeves long. I do not know whether I can describe the men's apparel but I will try. The pantaloons are extremely full, also tied around the waist with a very broad belt, which gives it the appearance of being all in one. A fat person dressed in this elegant costume I have heard very appropriately compared to a feather bed tied in the middle. They are tied round the neck like the girls' slips, and as many wear them with no collars visible, it is rather difficult to distinguish the gentlemen from the ladies. When I first saw the men with their bare necks it immediately struck me how very suitably they were equipped for the executioner.¹⁸

In that wild year of Owen's dictatorship when separate communities were forming and those who came on the "Boat-Load of Knowledge" were vainly striving to adjust themselves to the community, there came Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. Long before he reached the banks of the Wabash, he heard that the famous "Mr. Owen" was seeking to transform Americans from a believing to an unbelieving people. The Duke declared in his *Travels through North America* that he had heard the vigorous denunciations of Owen, especially among public men. Some thought his mind deranged. In fact, the Duke had heard so much about Owen that he determined to visit New Harmony. In due course he arrived at the town and put up at the tavern. He related in his account of the visit:

After all this, I came with the utmost expectation to New Harmony, curious to become acquainted with a man of such extraordinary sentiments. In the tavern, I accosted a man very plainly dressed, about fifty years of age, rather of low stature, who entered into a conversation with me, concerning the situation of the place, and the disordered state in which I would find every thing, where all was newly established &c. When I asked this man how long before

¹⁸ Letter to Mrs. Bakewell, April 8, 1826, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 80-84.

Mr. Owen would be there, he announced himself, to my no small surprise, as Mr. Owen, was glad at my visit and offered himself to show every thing, and explain to me whatever remained without explanation.¹⁹

Owen took the Duke around and showed him the Rappite churches, the frame one then being used as carpenter shops where boys were taught the mechanical arts. He also took him over to meet Maclure, who was living in Rapp's house. Bernhard drew a contrast between the ostentatious way in which Father Rapp had lived and the plain quarters occupied by Owen at the Tavern.

One evening Bernhard had a chance to see the social side of New Harmony. He noticed that the more refined and artistic young ladies elevated their noses in the presence of some of the country boys.

In the evening, I paid visits to some ladies, and witnessed philosophy and the love of equality put to the severest trial with one of them. She is named Virginia, from Philadelphia; is very young and pretty, was delicately brought up, and appears to have taken refuge here on account of an unhappy attachment. While she was singing and playing very well on the piano forte, she was told that the milking of the cows was her duty, and that they were waiting unmilked. Almost in tears she betook herself to this servile employment, deprecating the new social system, and its so much prized equality.

After the cows were milked, in doing which the poor girl was trod on by one, and daubed by another, I joined an aquatic party with the young ladies and some young philosophers, in a very good boat on the mudded meadows of the Wabash. The evening was beautiful moonlight, and the air very mild; the beautiful Miss Virginia forgot her *stable* sufferings, and regaled us with her sweet voice. Somewhat later we collected together in the house No. 2, appointed for a school-house, where all the young ladies and gentlemen of *quality* assembled. In spite of the equality so much recommended, this class of persons will not mix with the common sort, and I believe that all the well brought up members are disgusted, and will soon abandon the society. We amused ourselves exceedingly during the whole remainder of the evening, dancing cotillions, reels and waltzes, and with such animation as rendered it quite lively. New figures had been introduced among the cotillions, among which is one called the *new social system*. Several of the ladies made objections to dancing on Sunday; we thought however, that in this sanctuary of philosophy, such prejudices should be utterly discarded, and our arguments, as well as the inclination of the ladies, gained the victory.²⁰

The Duke seemed inclined to ridicule the principle of equality that had been injected into the colony by Owen. But it must be

¹⁹ Selections from *Travels through North America, during the Year 1825 and 1826 . . .*, II. *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, selected and edited by Harlow Lindley, pp. 418-437.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

remembered that the Duke's adherence to this principle was never very enthusiastic. It is not at all unlikely that the ladies with whom the Duke passed his time were trying to impress him with their social position and hence complained about the boors they were compelled to meet.

The Duke had many "conversations" with Owen, all pertaining to the "New Social System." When the Duke expressed doubts as to the practicability of making over Europe and the United States, Owen showed himself to be so "unalterably convinced" that the Duke was "grieved." He was particularly grieved because he had found in talking to the Harmonites that they were deceived in their expectations "and expressed their opinion that Mr. Owen had commenced on too grand a scale, and had admitted too many members, without the requisite selection!"²¹

And so no doubt the Duke thought Owen a little mad, but Bernhard had not caught the vision of the New Jerusalem that loomed up so highly before Owen. Indeed, the onetime cotton spinner, so intent upon the quality of his yarn, had now become a dreamer of one dream; henceforth mere arguments of mere people touched him only as flitting shadows before the glorious light of the perfect day.

Owen's ideas on marriage were the subject of much discussion in America. He had advocated unions based upon love and purely secular in character. He argued that it was altogether wrong and false to promise always to love an individual. Circumstances—the all-powerful and determining circumstances—might make it impossible for one to continue to love his wife; therefore, it was absurd to compel him to live with her and pretend he did. Owen hoped to carry out at New Harmony his ideas on marriage; therefore, when two couples presented themselves for marriage, Owen, in the presence of witnesses, merely asked them if they were willing to take each other as man and wife. When they replied that they were, he asked them to declare that any further ceremony was unnecessary. This they did but at the same time were married in the regular way by a Methodist minister.²² At that time, they believed this to be legally necessary but found later that the law did not require it.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See the letter of Sarah Pears to Mrs. Bakewell, April 8, 1826, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 80-84.

In a letter home, Mrs. Pears gave an account of these marriages:

There were two weddings last Sunday in the Hall. The parties with their bridesmaids and groomsmen were all dressed in the new costume, which is of black and white striped cotton, and as they have as yet but one apiece, and as one of the brides had been working in the boarding school kitchen all the preceding week, and had done a great deal of scrubbing in hers, it could not be very nice. She, poor girl, had first dressed herself very nicely in bridal white, but was persuaded by Mr. Owen and the bridegroom to lay aside these trappings of the old world, and to draw from its depository amongst the dirty clothes this elegant suit in which she was married. But I have been told that the change cost her many tears.²³

These couples had observed the rules laid down for community marriage by Owen. They had signified to the community their intention to marry three months before their union. And of course if they had followed literally the rules laid down by Owen, they would have merely appeared before the community at the end of the three months and signified their intention to live together. In case they should find their marriage intolerable, divorce could be made very simple. If they wished to separate, they would only have to appear before the community once more and declare their intention to part. If they were of the same mind after three months, they were free to enter into another marriage.

And so they lived on, singing, dancing, marrying and giving in marriage, talking and philosophizing, while the fields remained untilled, the looms unmanned, and the fences unrepaired.

Owen the serene one was not without his ruffled moments. Maclure gave him much trouble. It was he who was supposed to launch the schools; but somehow they did not materialize according to the splendid dreams that had been Maclure's and Owen's.

Maclure's delays in getting the school in operation swelled Owen's impatience to the point where he took a hand himself and proceeded to organize his own school under the direction of a Mr. Dorsey. This ruffled Maclure, who was not in very good health anyway. And when Owen asked Maclure to pay two bonds of \$20,000 each, held by Rapp, Maclure did so but at the same time called upon his utopian partner for a deed to a portion of the New Harmony estate so that he could carry on independently of Owen. Owen countered by drawing bills for the amount he claimed that Maclure owed him. Maclure posted up notices at New Harmony that he would not be

²³ *Ibid.*

responsible for Owen's debts. Owen answered these with his own notice declaring that he was still Maclure's partner and that he would honor debts incurred by Maclure.

And then, finally, the two angry utopians consented to arbitrate their differences, with the result that Maclure received his deed to the land and Owen \$5,000. Maclure paid Rapp the forty thousand, but he and Owen did not live happily together ever after. The partnership came to an end, while the enemies of the "Social System" took delight in pestering Owen with questions relating to his part in the unsavory mess. The story of the quarrel was an unctious morsel in the mouths of those unfriendly to the new order. Owen was obliged to spend many an hour explaining to audiences that Maclure was an old man who often became irritable and irrational.

Then too, Owen had trouble with a young man by the name of Paul Brown, who possessed a perverse nature. He posted up notices of meetings to discuss the "Social System," while Owen, feeling, perhaps, that the "Social System" needed more practice and less discussion, tore them down. Brown took his revenge by writing against Owen. He made much of the latter's desire to retain his interest in the property at New Harmony. Apparently Owen had said something about Brown's poverty—if we are to believe Brown :

He spoke of my poverty; saying, "because *you* are poor, you want those that have wealth, to make common property." He mentioned an instance of my necessity of borrowing, and said, "if you cannot provide support for *yourself*, how could you contrive means for the maintenance of eight or ten persons?" (or words to that effect;) alluding, no doubt, to some design he suspected or imagined I had, to attempt the founding of a community, which might draw some people from under *his* hammer and tongs. So then, here, this Mr. Robert Owen, who had publicly denounced individual property as one of the heads of that hydra which had hatched all the crimes and miseries of society, makes it the criterion of a man's worth, and depreciates one's character in proportion to the lack of it. This is not the only instance in which this man has exemplified a contempt of poverty, and deference for the indications of wealth and success.²⁴

Paul Brown was not the only one who made Owen's stay at New Harmony a difficult one. A certain William Taylor drifted into New Harmony one day; and, professing to be an ardent disciple of the new system, he prevailed upon Owen to sell him 1,500 acres of land to establish a community. The contract entered into between Owen and Taylor provided that the latter should have the land

²⁴ *Twelve Months in New Harmony*, p. 58.

for a certain sum of money "with all thereon." The story runs that Taylor, on the night before he was to come into possession, moved all the tools, livestock, and other property he could find onto the land. To further embarrass Owen, he set up a whisky distillery.

All these troubles in no wise shook Owen's optimism. He continued to voice unbounded faith in the colony's ultimate success.

On the Fourth of July in 1826, Owen stood up in the Rappite Church and made his famous Declaration of Mental Independence. A small band of devoted ones together with a more numerous crowd of those who were losing faith listened to "Old Bob" explain that Washington, Franklin, and Patrick Henry had merely glimpsed the light of mental freedom. These "worthies," Owen declared, had been so surrounded by old world prejudices as to make it impossible for them to penetrate the thick mental darkness about them. But now, Owen proclaimed the new freedom.

... I now Declare, to you and to the world, [he announced,] that *Man, up to this hour, has been, in all parts of the earth, a slave to a Trinity of the most monstrous evils that could be combined to inflict mental and physical evil upon his whole race.*

I refer to Private, or Individual Property—Absurd and Irrational Systems of Religion—and Marriage, founded on individual property combined with some one of these irrational systems of religion.²⁵

Once more, even as he had done in his City of London Tavern speech, Owen denounced the old order. The results were, as before, unfortunate. He was branded an infidel and an atheist—hard names for any man to be given at that time. But he had announced the new day. Henceforth time was to be reckoned from July 4, 1826—the beginning of mental independence. The *New Harmony Gazette* dated its issues as the "First Year of Mental Independence," etc. Like the French Revolutionists, Owen was seeking to cut loose from the past; but, also like them, he soon found the past clings to men with amazing tenacity.

While the Harmonites vainly sought to realize Owen's dreams, they at the same time did more than grope in darkness. The passengers on the "Boat-Load of Knowledge" had long since landed and set up their schools. And it is in this activity that the "Fair Side of New Harmony" is revealed.

²⁵ "Oration Containing a Declaration of Mental Independence . . .," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 329-331 (July 12, 1826).

CHAPTER XII

THE FAIR SIDE OF NEW HARMONY

IT WAS INDEED a glorious day for these utopians when Robert Owen of New Lanark arrived from England, and when the "Boat-Load of Knowledge" warped on to the Indiana shore it was a day never to be forgotten. Straightway the talent so long expected disembarked and was enthusiastically greeted by the hopeful Harmonites. They were not to be altogether disappointed, for the schools so long heralded were started and gave fair promise.

Far and wide the news had been spread that Robert Owen, supported by William Maclure, was to offer unique educational opportunities to the children of the community and the neighboring towns. Many people had come to New Harmony for no other purpose than to give their children a chance to be taught by famous teachers trained in the methods of Pestalozzi and Owen.

The dominant note in the educational program was that the subjects taught should be useful and practical. Both Owen and Maclure were opposed to the old system with its emphasis upon Latin and Greek. They were also in opposition to the use of the whip and other coercive methods practiced by the teachers of their day. Perhaps their views on what was to be done for the children of New Harmony can best be summarized by the following statement taken from the *New Harmony Gazette*: A child was to be given

Good dispositions and habits;

As sound a constitution as air, exercise and temperance can bestow;

A knowledge of the objects of nature around him, beginning with the most simple and proceeding as his faculties expand;

A knowledge of the outline of natural history and geography;

A knowledge of himself, and of human nature to render him charitable, kind and benevolent to all his fellow-creatures, and to form him into a rational being;

A facility in reading, writing, accounts and grammar;

Daily exercises in dancing, gymnastics, music and drawing;

A knowledge of mathematics, mechanics, chemistry, astronomy, anatomy and general history;

A knowledge of domestic economy, political economy (in its true significance) and government;

A knowledge of the theory and practice of agriculture; and lastly, a practical knowledge of some one or more useful manufacture, trade or other occu-

pation, that his employment may be varied for the improvement of his mental and physical powers.¹

This was certainly an ambitious undertaking for any group of educators, even those bent on building a new civilization. But Owen, with that supreme naïveté so characteristic of him, saw nothing in the way of its accomplishment. However, in the months that were to follow, he was to discover that the human nature of the teachers themselves was to make the task a very difficult one.

In the first place, Maclure, the man picked to father the schools, was in poor health and stayed at New Harmony only a short time. He left Say behind to act as his representative; but he too became ill, and so it came about that Madame Fretageot took charge of Maclure's business. She proved a very capable manager, watching over his interests with scrupulous care. After the dissolution of the community, she continued to conduct a school at New Harmony supported by Maclure.

Joseph Neef, Maclure's Pestalozzian teacher, was an intractable individual who on occasions swore at his pupils and stormed at Owen. Mrs. Chase, who tried her hand at teaching music, drawing, and painting, was far too attractive for the peace of mind of the Owen brothers. But the most temperamental of all in the "Boat-Load of Knowledge" was William Phiquepal d'Arusmont, who captured the heart of Fanny Wright and no doubt contributed to drive that brilliant lady into a public career for solace from an unhappy marriage.

When the schools actually got under way, it appears that Madame Neef, the capable wife of Joseph Neef, was conducting the infant school with about one hundred pupils. She, assisted by Madame Fretageot, was following the methods so successfully used by Owen at New Lanark.

Joseph Neef, with the aid of his four daughters and one son, took charge of the boys and girls between the ages of five and twelve years. In the best days of the school there were about two hundred pupils enrolled. The children were taught according to the methods of Pestalozzi and were also given instruction in industrial subjects. It was the industrial part of their training that Maclure emphasized, and in this respect he stands out as a pioneer in education.

¹ Robert Owen, "The Social System," *New Harmony Gazette*, I, 169-170 (February 28, 1827).

He insisted that every child of the productive classes should be taught a trade and that his labor if properly directed should more than pay for the cost of educating him.²

True to the principles of Owen, the children in Neef's school were regarded as belonging to the community and were not allowed to return to their parents at the end of the day. The little ones slept in bunks above the workshops. Sarah Cox Thrall, who died many years ago in New Harmony, told of her experiences as a little girl in this Pestalozzian school. She related how the girls were sent out early in the morning to milk the cows and also how the milk with mush cooked in large kettles formed their breakfast. It was certainly good, wholesome food for young growing children, but there seemed to be elements lacking in their diet. "We had bread but once a week," she declared, "—on Saturdays. I thought if I ever got out, I would kill myself eating sugar and cake."³

Sarah Thrall further related how she and the other children marched in a body to the schoolroom in Community House No. 2, where they were given lessons in arithmetic and other subjects, all interspersed with much singing. She had a vivid recollection of the blackboard that extended along one side of the room and the wires with balls on them used for counting. No doubt these wires and balls were very much the same as we see today in Chinese laundries. Every minute of the day was occupied; and, after mush and milk were served again, the children went to their bunks.

We went to bed at sundown in little bunks suspended in rows by cords from the ceiling. Sometimes one of the children at the end of the row would swing back her cradle, and, when it collided in the return bound with the next bunk, it set the whole row bumping together. This was a favorite diversion, and caused the teachers much distress. At regular intervals we used to be marched to the community apothecary shop, where a dose that tasted like sulphur was impartially dealt out to each pupil, just as in Squeers' Dotheboys school. Children regularly in the boarding-school were not allowed to see their parents, except at rare intervals. I saw my father and mother twice in two years. We had a little song we used to sing:

Number 2 pigs locked up in a pen,
When they get out, it's now and then;
When they get out, they sneak about,
For fear old Neef will find them out.⁴

² See George B. Lockwood, *The New Harmony Movement*, p. 242.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁴ *Ibid.*

There was one other school at New Harmony called the School for Adults, where pupils over twelve years of age were trained in the useful arts. Lectures were often given by Troost, Lesueur, Thomas Say, and Piquetpal d'Arusmont.

The separation of children from their parents was a source of much grief to some of the parents. Mrs. Pears was sorely troubled when she heard that her daughters were to be taken from her :

My mind is absolutely in such a state that I am almost incapable of doing anything, and next week expect my daughters will be taken from me. If I am sick I cannot have my own daughters to nurse me, but must be taken to the hospital to be taken care of by strangers. I know not really how I can write such things and keep my senses.⁵

How often Owen must have sighed when confronted with the anxious and solicitous parents. Like Plato, he must have longed to send them out into the country so that he might mold the children into his own pattern. The parents proved so irrational they could not solve their own problems of government and economic support, and the schools went down with the community.

You also know, that the chief difficulty at this time arose from the difference of opinion among the Professors and Teachers brought here by Mr. Maclure, relative to the education of the children, and to the consequent delay in putting any one of their systems into practice.⁶

Owen then went on to say that each of the teachers drew his pupils apart from the others and undertook the entire instruction of them without giving the pupils an opportunity to come in contact with other pupils and instructors. This course, Owen argued, tended to promote separatist tendencies and thus defeated his end of educating all as one family in good social habits.

It was certainly ironical that Owen should have started to socialize a group of people with a staff of teachers so unsocially minded as the ones he had brought to New Harmony. It would have been natural to expect that Owen would have first taken the pains to train his staff of teachers in his methods before the work of instruction in the schools began. He certainly thought it necessary to do so at New Lanark, but it became increasingly obvious that Owen

⁵ Letter of Sarah Pears to Mrs. Bakewell, March 10, 1826, in *Pears Papers*, pp. 70-74.

⁶ Robert Owen, "Address Delivered by Robert Owen, on Sunday, the 6th of May, 1827, in the New-Harmony Hall, and to the Members of the Neighboring Communities," *New Harmony Gazette*, II, 254-255 (May 9, 1827).

was passing from a man of business and sound administrative judgment to a dreamer who found details too trivial for his attention.

Owen's criticism of the teaching and instructors at New Harmony seems justified by the reports made by Madame Fretageot to Maclure. In her letters written to him during the last part of 1826, she told of the quarrels and misunderstandings among the teaching staff. She explained how Neef's school had split up, each teacher taking his pupils to himself. She had collected her little charges and marched them off to Maclure's house. Piquel, in a great fury, had taken his three pupils to the Stepple House.⁷

While Owen saw in the breakdown of education at New Harmony a cause of the collapse of the great adventure, others looked elsewhere for causes. Some blamed Owen himself for the debacle; others dilated on the confusion wrought by the discordant spirits who trooped into the community; still others insisted that it failed for the same reason that all collective schemes must fail, because the incentives for individual effort were lacking.

Robert Dale Owen, who watched the experiment with critical eyes, declared his father made a great mistake in trying out his ideas in America.

The average wages of farm labor here [he wrote] amount to a dollar and a quarter a day, or seven dollars and a half a week; and even if we put wheat at a dollar and eighty-five cents a bushel, which is its price only in our seaboard cities and when it is ready for shipment, a week's labor in husbandry will purchase *four* bushels of wheat, instead of a *bushel and a quarter* as in England. The need of cooperation or some other protection for labor may be said to be threefold greater than here.

My father made another and still greater mistake. A believer in the force of circumstances and of the instinct of self-interest to reform all men, however ignorant or vicious, he admitted into his village all comers, without recommendatory introduction or any examination whatever. This error was the more fatal, because it is in the nature of any novel experiment, or any putting forth of new views which may tend to revolutionize the opinions or habits of society, to attract to itself (as the Reformation did, three hundred years ago, and as Spiritualism does today) waifs and strays from surrounding society; men and women of crude, ill considered, extravagant notions; nay, worse, vagrants who regard the latest heresy but as a stalking-horse for pecuniary gain, or a convenient cloak for immoral demeanor⁸

⁷ See Madame Marie Duclos Fretageot Letters, extracts made by Mrs. Nora Fretageot, MSS.

⁸ *Threading My Way*, p. 259.

Madame Fretageot watched the utopians leave one by one, until only a few remained at New Harmony. Fanny Wright and her sister came and went. Fanny left to launch out on her experiment at Nashoba for the redemption of Negroes. Mrs. Chase stayed on to teach and flirt while her husband experimented with gases. But at length "he closed his door to her," and for a time she roamed around the community. Legend has it that she often walked alongside of Robert Dale Owen and read verses to him as he plowed the rich soil of New Harmony.

Madame Fretageot struggled along for a few months with the support of Maclure; then she appears to have given up the school. Owen, before his debate with Campbell,⁹ visited New Harmony for a very short time. This was in March, 1829, but by this time all semblance of the order he had so vainly sought to establish was gone. The communities¹⁰ had in fact dissolved after his farewell address in May, 1827.

During the very brief lifetime of New Harmony, it had become the rendezvous for some of the outstanding men and women of America. Especially did the community attract philosophers and men of science. Besides those that landed from the "Boat-Load of Knowledge," there came such people as Josiah Warren and, of course, Frances Wright. Warren fell under Owen's spell when the latter visited Cincinnati before the community at New Harmony had been launched. He had tried his hand at leading orchestras and making inventions, but when he listened to Owen explain his "New Social System," he was determined to join the utopians. Two years at New Harmony was long enough to convince this idealistic man that communism was not the way out of the social-economic dilemma. But from Owen he gained the idea that labor produced all wealth and should enjoy the goods produced. Owen had already talked about labor notes as the ideal form of currency; therefore Warren left New Harmony bent on opening up a store where goods could be exchanged on the basis of labor spent in producing and selling them. The result was the famous "Time Store" opened up in Cincinnati where the so-called labor notes were brought into use. For a short while this venture flourished; but Warren discovered other dreams, and the store passed on into history.

⁹ See below, chap. XV.

¹⁰ There seems to have been at least ten communities established on the New Harmony estate by 1827.

Frances Wright, made of the stuff of reformers, found in Owen a man after her own heart. But she was not content to be a mere follower and teacher in Owen's "New Society." She too brought forth her own plans of salvation: first, to redeem the black man from slavery at Nashoba, and then, later on, to emancipate women from their political and economic bondage to men. With an ardor that was inexplicable to Americans of her day, this brilliant and gifted woman stood up before astonished audiences and preached equal rights for women. On marriage she had much to say. Some declared that free love was her goal and hissed out a warning against harkening to this daughter of Satan. But she talked on before huge audiences of men and women who shuddered in delightful wickedness as she drew word pictures of a new paradise of freedom.

Fanny Wright and Robert Dale Owen, who became her intellectual partner, edited the *New Harmony Gazette*, which was later called the *Free Enquirer* and published in New York. Together they championed the cause of a political party for labor—the Working Men's Party of New York. They fought for free popular education and never ceased denouncing the narrow religious bigotry so characteristic of their time.

Out of New Harmony, therefore, blew a strong wind of freedom, bracing and invigorating to liberals who now held up their heads and dared to speak out. There were many in America during this period who longed to voice their liberal sentiments on religion, but the puritan pressure was so strong that social and political death awaited those who transgressed. While Robert Dale Owen was editor of the *Enquirer*, Nicholas Trist, who had married the granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson, wrote an article that Robert Dale Owen printed in the *Enquirer*. It seems that Trist's initials appeared at the end of the article. This brought from him a protesting letter. He pointed out that while he was sympathetic with Owen's ideas, he did not wish to have that fact made public. Trist was a clerk in the State Department at the time and no doubt was hoping for higher political office.

George Flower, who, with Morris Birkbeck, founded the English settlement in Edwards County, Illinois, wrote of Owen's influence in America. He declared that long after Owen had departed from New Harmony his influence was manifest in the daily lives of the

people. He gave one particular instance of this influence that has the ring of authenticity:

A father of a family, a religious man, opposed to most of Mr. Owen's opinions, said to me: "Well, in one thing I think he is right—in treatment of children—and I shall leave off whipping."¹¹

Though New Harmony was a failure as a community, and its failure was blown to the four winds in America, nevertheless Owen's faith in the community idea was so great as to inspire many to go on building other communities. In fact, Owen started thousands on the road to Utopia. In the twenty years following the founding of New Harmony, scheme after scheme was launched to create the Kingdom of Heaven in America. Besides the communities that were strictly Owenite in form,¹² there were many like Brook Farm and the North American Phalanx that followed the principles of Fourier.

Owen was, indeed, more than an episode in America. He was a prophet of protest, summoning brave souls to follow him away from narrow provincialism into a land of freedom. And thousands did follow him seeking to escape from the stern realities of frontier life.

¹¹ George Flower, *History of the English Settlement in Edwards County, Illinois*, p. 284.

¹² John Humphrey Noyes in his *History of American Socialism*, 17, gives the following list of Owenite communities: Blue Spring Community, Indiana; Co-operative Society, Pennsylvania; Coxsackie Community, New York; Forestville Community, Indiana; Franklin Community, Indiana; Haverstraw Community, New York; Kendal Community, Ohio; Macluria, Indiana; Nashoba, Tennessee; and Yellow Spring Community, Ohio.

CHAPTER XIII

BAITING THE CLERGY

AFTER OWEN had delivered his farewell address to the few inhabitants who remained at New Harmony, he journeyed back to the East, to Philadelphia, where he gave a lecture explaining the progress that was being made in community life on the New Harmony estate. He also explained his side of the controversy with Maclure.

The newspapers reported crowded audiences eager to hear "Mr. Owen, the atheist." And he, not one whit cast down by the failure of New Harmony, continued to expound his gospel of the "New System." After many meetings, Owen took ship for England, where he arrived July 24, 1827.

Once back in his home land, Owen made public an address directed to the "Agriculturists, Mechanics, and Manufacturers, both Masters and Operatives, of Great Britain and Ireland." Again Owen called attention to the great paradox—poverty amidst vastly increased production. Machinery, he declared, was competing with labor and forcing the price of labor ever lower.

The workers under this system were destined to sink into hopeless poverty, and even slavery, with a few families possessing all the wealth. At this point, Owen was well ahead of Marx in his prediction of increasing misery as the lot of the working classes.

But his cure was far different from Marx's at this stage of his thought. Owen advocated labor exchanges where producers could bring their goods and exchange them for notes based upon the "prime costs" of the materials used plus the labor hours spent in their creation.¹

Owen seems to have moved away from the community idea based upon common property. Perhaps the failure at New Harmony had dampened his enthusiasm for a period. But, of course, he never admitted it. One Sunday morning after his return to England, a breakfast was given by the London Co-operative Society. "There were present several elegant distinguished females." After Owen had read to them his address to the "Manufacturers

¹ See the *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 73-74 (December 12, 1827). Also in "Report to the County of Lanark . . . , 1820," *Life*, by Robert Owen, IA, 263-310 (Appendix S).

and Mechanics," he told his audience that the ten communities at New Harmony were in a thriving condition and success was in prospect. The stories of their failure, he declared, were circulated by his enemies in the American newspapers and were false.

Before Owen left for America again, he visited the Orbiston Community near Glasgow, an enterprise conducted by Abram Combe, one of Owen's disciples. Indeed, coöperation and community building were very much in the air at this time. But Owen's thoughts were on America, and so he sailed with three of his sons for New Orleans on the ship "Consbrook," November 16, 1827.

By January he had reached New Orleans, where he began a series of lectures in the American Theater. At this stage of his career the clergy and religion loomed up as the great obstacles to human progress; therefore his lectures were filled with attacks upon the priesthood. He had much to say about his "System" as well, but the clergy received most of his attention. Perhaps he was smarting under the blows he had received at their hands since he had embarked on the New Harmony adventure.

The New Orleans newspapers did not ignore him. In fact, they gave him generous publicity. The *Louisiana Courier* of January 23, 1828, carried this item on his lectures:

Whatever may be thought of this gentleman and his plans, we believe all admit his honesty of purpose, his disinterestedness, the importance of the object which he advocates, his perseverance in pressing it, and the ability and boldness with which he opposes popular prejudices, [as] he calls them, of every description. Feeling, as he appears to do, full conviction in the truth of the principles which he promulgates, he courts objections from his audience and he is ready to give any explanation required.

The *New Orleans Courier* called attention to the great press of people to listen to Owen in the Government House, for it appears that the legislature offered Owen its building for his lectures. So great was the interest that "several of our most respectable citizens [were] obliged to return. . . ."²

The same journal commented the next day on the complete triumph of right conduct over popular prejudice. When Mr. Owen arrived, a few days ago, from Liverpool, the feelings of the public in opposition to him and his plans were of a very strong character. He met them fairly and openly, yet with his usual quiet dignity of manner, evidently arising

² *New Orleans Courier*, January 28, 1828.

from his conviction in the truth of his "New Views," yet opposed as these views are both in principle and practice to the strongest prejudices which we have imbibed from infancy, he fairly conquered these prejudices by a simple statement of facts, which all who reflect in every country admit, and by the close and accurate deductions which he drew from a comparison of all these facts. . . . We observed very few females among Mr. Owen's audiences. Were we to speak the truth we should say that a mistaken influence was exerted to keep them away from a false shame of delicacy, as it was known Mr. Owen would touch upon matrimony and the sexual intercourse. However, for any thing we heard, these lectures were most strictly moral, and any lady who attends balls and plays, or reads novels, would stand less chance of being corrupted at these lectures than when engaged in either of the other modes of amusement.

After Owen had laid bare the fallacies taught by the clergy, he finally issued a challenge to them in writing :

Gentlemen—I have now finished a course of lectures in this city, the principles of which are in direct opposition to those which you have been taught it your duty to preach. It is of immense importance to the world that truth upon these momentous subjects should be now established upon a certain and sure foundation. You and I, and all our fellowmen are deeply interested that there should be no further delay. With this view, without one hostile or unpleasant feeling on my part, I propose a friendly public discussion, the most open that the city of New-Orleans will afford, or if you prefer it, a more private meeting, when half a dozen friends of each party shall be present, in addition to half a dozen gentlemen whom you may associate with you in the discussion. The time and place of meeting to be of your appointment.

I propose to prove, as I have already attempted to do in my lectures, that all the religions of the world have been founded on the ignorance of mankind; that they are directly opposed to the never-changing laws of our nature; that they have been and are the real source of vice, disunion and misery of every description; that they are now the only real bar to the formation of a society of virtue, of intelligence, of charity in its most extended sense, and of sincerity and kindness among the whole human family; and that they can be no longer maintained except through the ignorance of the mass of the people, and the tyranny of the few over that mass.

With feelings of perfect good will to you, which extend also in perfect sincerity to all mankind, I subscribe myself your friend in a just cause.

Robt. Owen.³

Then Owen tacked the following on the end of this gentle challenge :

P.S. If this proposal should be declined, I shall conclude, as I have long most conscientiously been compelled to do, that the principles which I advocate are unanswerable truths.⁴

³ *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 169 (March 28, 1828).

⁴ *Ibid.*

Owen's logic, or lack of it, in his conclusion was the subject of criticism in the *Louisiana Advertiser* of January 29. This journal stated the opinion that Owen's "deduction" was "neither charitable nor logical." And the next day the same newspaper had this remark to make:

The gasconading challenge of Mr. Owen, clothed in a tattered robe of modesty, meets with notice only to prevent its effect on the weak and ignorant. He has the presumption and vanity to imagine that the absurdities which he propounds as a system, are even recommended by the charm of novelty. Perhaps it is only the narrowness of his education which prevents him from perceiving that the same irrational schemes were urged by numbers, with all the energy of conviction, in the time of the commonwealth of England—or will he explain the difference, if any exists, between his notions and those of Godwin, which have been before us for half a century? Is it by the use of a few compound, long syllable, Greek-derived terms, that he can mislead the public? Boldness and presumption will go a great way, and by telling mankind that they are fools, they may possibly believe it.

And finally the editor flung at Owen:

Mr. Owen is too full of his own system to be able to weigh the merits of any opposing argumentation, and thinks himself too much a Jack-the-Giant-killer not to come off with victory in his own imagination. He may be assured that such conclusions will be drawn by no one but himself.

Owen waited, but no one came out of the "Cotton Kingdom" to defend the cause of revealed religion. It was left for a Baptist preacher, Alexander Campbell of Bethany, Virginia, to take up the challenge.

But meantime, Owen was not too wrapped up in his own ideas to be unable to spot an institution in New Orleans that delighted his heart. In that city so much under French influence, young men of good family formed alliances with ladies of color, the famed quadroons, whose beauty and grace were known throughout the South. These quadroons were in many cases nearly white, being descendants of unions such as Owen witnessed. It was the practice to send the daughters born of these irregular unions to Paris for education, after which they returned to America to follow in their mothers' footsteps.

Owen's liberalism never went far enough to include the black race in his new society. Wherever he came in contact with slavery it never aroused his indignation, nor did he see in this institution of concubinage anything incongruous with his general humani-

tarian outlook. Therefore, he rushed as usual into an enthusiastic endorsement of New Orleans morality.

Accustomed, as I have been, to visit many large cities, and observe the state of society in them, I could not avoid remarking an extraordinary absence of all appearance of female indelicacy, so offensive in all other large cities, in Europe and America. I was led to enquire the cause which produced this improvement in your city; for I had been prepared to expect the most licentious manners of every description. It was satisfactorily explained to me when I was informed of the singular character and position of the female quattoons [quadroons],—supplying, with the least degradation of manners, mind and feelings, those natural wants which are supplied in other large cities through a medium so immoral and degrading as to pollute whatever comes within its atmosphere.

The female quattoon [quadroon] is taught, from infancy, to consider it an elevation of character to be connected with a white male; her own mind, therefore, remains uncontaminated with those low vices which always succeed prostitution in other countries; but the female quattoon [quadroon] continues chaste in her own thoughts and feelings. She is, therefore, unknown to herself, the preserver of the morals of our young men,—and, by this accidental arrangement, which, I believe, exists only in your city, more degradation of character and crime is prevented than superficial observers know how to estimate.⁵

Owen wrote this and more on the steamboat "George Washington," anchored in the Mississippi. It was a bold statement to put into print, even in New Orleans, but in New England it was regarded as branding him as a very dangerous man with immoral and infidel ideas.

While Owen was in New Orleans, he received a letter from a southern slave holder by the name of Robert Secot, who declared his intention of freeing twenty young slaves and wanted Owen to take charge of them. He offered \$5,000 to be used for settling them upon land and otherwise providing for them. He stipulated, however, that he did not want the males to have promiscuous intercourse with white women; intercourse with females of their own color should be adhered to.

No evidence exists that Owen paid any attention to this offer, but the very nature of it clearly shows that Owen's lectures constantly brought him into contact with those who had broken away from the conventional herd and sought the adventure of wander-

⁵ Robert Owen, "To the Inhabitants of New Orleans," *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 186-187 (April 9, 1828).

ing in strange pastures. It was unfortunate for Owen's career as a reformer that he should have attracted such people, for their influence served to lure him farther from the path of practical progress.

Owen's challenge to the clergy was not allowed to go on unaccepted. In the early spring of 1828, there appeared in the *Christian Baptist* a letter addressed to a correspondent who signed himself "A." In this letter Alexander Campbell, the editor and publisher of the journal, refused to meet a Dr. Underhill, one of Owen's followers, but declared himself willing to meet Owen :

Mr. A.—

Dear Brother—YOUR favor of the 22d ultimo lies before me—I am always glad to cooperate with the household of faith in support of our common cause.—As to this Doctor Underhill, he is too obscure to merit any attention from me on the Atheism and Deism of his philosophy. If I lived in the neighborhood with him, and should he throw himself in my way, I might find it my duty either to kill him, or to break a lance over his steel cap. But to go out of my way to meet such a gentleman would be rather incompatible with my views of propriety. If his great master, Mr. Robert Owen, will engage to debate the whole system of his moral and religious philosophy with me, if he will pledge himself to prove any position affirmative of his atheistical sentiments as they lie scattered over the pages of the *New-Harmony Gazette*—if he will engage to do this coolly and dispassionately in a regular and systematic debate, to be moderated by a competent tribunal, I will engage to take the negative and disprove all his affirmative positions, in a public debate to be holden any place equidistant from him and me. I think such a discussion is needed, and, in the armor of the Bible, I feel prepared to meet the sage philosopher of New-Harmony at a proper time and place. But in the mean time I will not draw a bow, save against the king of the sceptics of the city of Mental Independence.

My dear sir, you are doubtless more than able to drive off to the wilderness this wild boar who lies under your hills and sheep folds, seeking whom he may devour.

Your neighboring clergy are true to the character the Saviour gave of such folds in his time—The hireling, fleeth when the wolf cometh; but the good shepherd endangereth his life for the sheep. With every benevolent wish, I am your fellow laborer in the Lord's vineyard.

A. CAMPBELL.^c

Owen was not slow in answering Campbell. He agreed with him that "such a discussion is needed" and suggested "Cincinnati or any other central place in the western country" as the location.

^c Cited by the *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 215 (April 30, 1828).

He wanted the following points to form the basis of the discussion :

- 1st. Whether all religions are or are not opposed to facts?
- 2d. Whether all religions do or do not virtually destroy all charity, except for one sect, in thought, word and action?
- 3d. Whether religion does or does not render it necessary that the great mass of mankind, in all countries, should be kept in ignorance and poverty?
- 4th. Whether all religions do or do not require that infants and children should be taught to think that there is merit in believing that the doctrines of their own religion are true and that all other religions are false; and that there is demerit in believing otherwise.
- 5th. Whether all religions do or do not teach that there is merit and demerit in loving and hating liking and disliking *according to their doctrines*, whether in unison with man's natural feelings or in opposition to them.
- 6th. Whether almost all bad passions, vices and moral evils, do or do not emanate from the instruction given in infancy and childhood, that there is merit and demerit in belief and in liking and disliking.
- 7th. And lastly, whether mankind can be trained to become more happy, more intelligent, independent, charitable and kind to each other with or without religion?⁷

This was indeed a tremendous order ; but Owen was made of the stuff of iconoclasts, and no idol was too great for him to smash.

In the issue of the *New Harmony Gazette* of August 6 appeared a copy of the letter written by Alexander Campbell taken from the *Christian Baptist*. The letter was written to Robert Owen and was a formal acceptance of Owen's challenge. Campbell declared that while he was unwilling to accept the idea that Christianity was something to be proved true or false, he nevertheless felt that a discussion was necessary.

Owen in his New Orleans challenge had suggested the calling together of the clergy that they might see the way of truth. Once the clergy saw the falseness and error of their position, they would straightway come over to the path of true rationalism and the New Moral World. But Campbell declared he would have nothing to do with calling a conference of the clergy :

As to calling in a conference of all the clergy and such of your sceptical friends as you please, for the purpose of a sort of general confabulation, I have to remark as this was no part of the challenge which I have accepted, I can say nothing about it. I may, indeed, remark that I have no objection to your assembling all your brethren sceptics from Harmony to Lanark if any place could be found large enough to hold them. But as only one person

⁷ Letter of Robert Owen to Alexander Campbell, n.d., in the *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 228 (May 14, 1828).

can speak at once, to be understood and regarded, I see no good reason of calling such an assemblage—For my part, however, I can cordially agree to your assembling with you in the debate as many of your sceptical friends as you may think proper.^s

The stage was now set for the most famous debate in the history of religious controversy in the United States. Owen arranged to call on his antagonist at Bethany on his way to England, when the time and place of the debate would be determined.

Taking leave of New Orleans, Owen decided to stop at New Harmony for a few weeks. With his three sons, Robert Dale, David Dale, and Richard, he left New Orleans on the steamboat "George Washington" and moved up the Great River. Owen and his sons watched the passing show—the taking on of new passengers, the refueling with great piles of cordwood, and the discharging and receiving of freight of all kinds. Cows bellowed, pigs squealed, and chickens cackled, while rawboned frontiersmen talked through their noses and squirted tobacco juice into the turbid water. Owen, dressed in seedy clothes, moved about among the passengers striking up discussions on the "New Social System" whenever he could find a listener.

After many stops for lectures, Owen finally reached the Wabash in the springtime. The river had spread out over the bottom lands. Settlers took to the roofs of their cabins, and pigs and other livestock were reported balancing themselves on floating trunks of trees. The sycamores and maples were bursting into green; the robins hopped over the corn stubble; and the meadowlarks sang in the damp pastures. But "Mr. Owen of New Lanark," deep in the problem of redeeming America from the tyranny of the priesthood, saw little of this unfolding spring at New Harmony.

After he had rested for a few days, Owen summoned the inhabitants to meet him in the Hall. He had much to say of the "superstition and mental degradation" that still prevailed over Europe and America, but he had hope that the hold of the priests would soon be broken. However, he had been disappointed with what had occurred at New Harmony:

I tried here a new course for which I was induced to hope that fifty years of political liberty had prepared the American population: that is, to govern themselves advantageously. I supplied land, houses, and the use of much

^s III, 324.

capital; and I tried, each in their own way, all the different parties who collected here; but experience proved that the attempt was premature to unite a number of strangers not previously educated for the purpose, who should carry on extensive operations for their common interest and live together as a common family. I afterwards tried, before my last departure hence, what could be done by those who associated through their own choice and in small numbers; to these I gave leases of large tracts of good land for ten thousand years upon a nominal rent and for moral conditions only; and these I did expect would have made a progress during my absence; but now, upon my return, I find that the habits of the individual system were so powerful that these leases have been, with a few exceptions, applied for individual purposes and individual gain; and in consequence they must return again into my hands.⁹

Owen still held out hope, however, that the people on the New Harmony estate would unite on a scheme of exchanging their labor for labor. But it was quite apparent that the community idea was impossible of achievement at New Harmony, and Owen was fully aware of it.

By summer Owen was on his way east to see Campbell, his mind occupied with thoughts of redeeming mankind from religious superstition.

Traveling to Boston from Cincinnati, Timothy Flint, editor of the *Western Monthly Review*, was a passenger with Owen on the stage that took them from Wheeling, Ohio, to Baltimore. Flint wrote an account of his experiences while on the tour. His description of Owen is especially interesting:

Mr. Owen is by birth a Welshman, is fifty-seven years of age, and would be taken to be ten years younger. He has a mild and shrewd physiognomy, noways remarkable, except for wearing a kind of foreign, or weather beaten aspect. He stoops a little, and always seems cheerful. He was dressed in blue broadcloth, with clothes of plain and farmer cut, with roundabout or spencer buttoned close about him, and he wore a plain straw hat. This gave him a quaint rusticity of appearance, not much in keeping with his reputation for opulence; but happily coinciding with the tenets of his *social system*, and his avowed views of the proper order of society.¹⁰

Flint tells of a long debate between Owen and a young lawyer:

It was amusing to observe his [Owen's] mode of managing his argument with our vehement and voluble young friend. He patiently heard the harangue

⁹ "Address Delivered by Robert Owen at a Public Meeting of the Inhabitants of New-Harmony, on Sunday, April 13, 1828," *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 204-205 (April 23, 1828).

¹⁰ "A Tour," *Western Monthly Review*, II, 193-209 (September, 1828).

of his fluent antagonist to the finish, and in his manner of watching him, reminded me strangely of the sly old grimalkin waiting calmly for the prey. Then he ran back in a review of the arguments of his antagonist, refuting some, parrying others, and treating others with a peculiar kind of irony. This calm manner of arguing soon raised the voice and temper of his respondent to a most annoying degree of excitement, and shortly reduced the dispute to simple affirmation and denial on authority. The point of dispute between them had chiefly turned on the dogmas of Calvinism.¹¹

After the lawyer left the stage at Washington, Owen carried on the debate with "an intelligent lady" who was on her way to Boston. Flint noticed "a most gentlemanly deference" and a "tempering of his customary mordant irony" on the part of Owen as he argued with the lady. At one point in their discussion she expressed her feeling of pity for one who held such a "dreary and desolating creed" as Owen's—a belief without the hope of immortality. Owen declared that he had never been happier than in the last twenty-five years, and then he added that she must feel her hopes dampened when she reflected that the greater part of mankind would have to endure an "eternal roasting."

After the lady had finished with Owen, Flint took him in hand. But the discussion that took place was on a very gentle plane. Flint was far too liberal in his views to quarrel with Owen. When the latter spoke of his belief in the perfectibility of man, Flint declared "that amidst the immense improvements and changes of the present day, I saw clearly increasing avarice and selfishness, as a melancholy appendage to that improvement—and that I saw no harbinger to his millennium, except in the old saw, that the *darkest time in the night, is that, which immediately precedes the dawn.*"¹²

As the stagecoach lurched over the rough roads, Flint learned what a "Christian gentleman" this atheist Owen could be. It was true that Flint found him unyielding when it came to his ideas; but Owen was so patient and gentle and so filled with kindness that no resentment toward him could be harbored.

More lectures in the cities of the East followed, and Owen made his promised visit to Campbell. The two men agreed to meet in Cincinnati on the second Monday of April the next year. Then Owen once more took passage for England.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

It was while he was in England on this trip that he planned a colony which made New Harmony and all previous efforts appear trifling adventures. His new scheme was truly imperial in its proportions. He determined to approach the Mexican Republic with a request for Texas and a great strip of northern Mexico to establish his "System."

CHAPTER XIV

A MESSAGE TO MEXICO

THE SUMMER of 1828 found Owen once more in England ready for a new adventure in community building. New Harmony he left to its fate. The incessant bickerings, dissensions, and complaints broke his interest in the place; but these troubles by no means shook his faith in the truth of the community idea.

One day in that summer, a letter came from Benjamin R. Milan offering Owen land for colonization in Texas. Milan, together with General Wavell, had received grants of land from the Mexican government. Owen almost at once decided that he too would make a request for land. There on the great plains of Texas he would start a colony on a truly magnificent scale.

In his eagerness he wrote to the Mexican minister to England, Rocafuerte. If we are to believe Owen, however, it was the Mexican minister who first approached him on the subject. But Owen wrote of this affair many years later and may easily have forgotten the sequence of events. In any case, there is a letter from Rocafuerte in Owen's correspondence which indicates pretty clearly that the former did not initiate the scheme for a colony in Texas:

Ivy Lodge, Fulham,
17th October, 1828.

My Dear Sir:

The more I reflect upon your plan [the] more obstacles I meet in its execution, and greater is my apprehension that you will not succeed in Texas; the interest I take in your concerns and the value I set on your time always applied to useful purposes stimulates me to tell you my candid opinion on this interesting subject. I am afraid you will be completely disappointed in your expectations, and in carrying into effect your benevolent scheme of moral reform in such a country as Texas, and if I dare suggest to you the idea of giving up your trip to Mexico by the next Packet, I would do it, guided by a feeling of respect I have for you.

I have sent your memorial to the Mexican Government and have recommended it, but I fear it will not meet the sanction of the Ministry, at all events I think it would be more advisable to wait for an answer. Hoping you will excuse my frankness, proceeding from the interest I take in your welfare, I have the honour to be,

My dear Sir,
Your most obedient servant,
VIC^{TE} ROCAFUERTEZ.¹

¹ October 17, 1828, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

If the Mexican minister thought he had dampened Owen's enthusiasm, he was very much mistaken. Owen, made of the stuff of reformers, had already engaged passage on the next packet, and not all the powers of this earth could throw him off the trail to Mexico and world regeneration.

In a reply to Rocafuerte, Owen declared :

I knew many formidable difficulties would present themselves as I proceeded in the negotiation, but I have always had the prejudices of mankind to overcome, and my success has given me confidence to meet them openly and fairly under every form in which they may rise. And the republic of Mexico with the Governments of south, north and east, seem to me at this period to be in a state peculiarly favourable to be beneficially acted upon to an extent that few unacquainted with the real state of the human mind in Europe and America can readily imagine. The world is, as it appears to me, full ripe for a great moral change, and it may be, I think, commenced the most advantageously in the New World; the Mexican Republic presents perhaps at the moment the best point at which to begin new and mighty operations. . . .²

The march was now on to Mexico. Owen wasted no time in speculating upon his chances of success but shoved off once more for the new world. He had already composed a memorial for the Mexican government, in which he sketched his plan for the regeneration of the world.

Owen managed to boil down his social ideas to a residuum of two points, or two sciences, which he claimed to have originated by experimentation :

The first, the science of forming a superior character in every child to whom the science shall be applied in his education and circumstances.

The second, the science by which every child to whom it shall be applied from infancy to maturity, shall be so trained and placed that, he shall enjoy the best of every thing for his individual life in security from birth to death.³

Then Owen, coming down to particulars, asked that he be granted the province of Texas and Coahuila. He asked that the independence of the new state be guaranteed by Mexico, the United States, and Great Britain. Then Owen presented an argument, most remarkable of all, for the granting of his request :

That it [Texas] is a frontier province between the Mexican and North American Republics which is now settling under such circumstances as are

² October 31, 1828, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

³ Robert Owen, "Memorial of Robert Owen to the Mexican Republic," *Secretaria De Relaciones Exteriores. Ano de 1828*.

likely to create jealousies and irritations between citizens of these states and which most probably at some future period will terminate in a war between the two Republics.⁴

Owen tells us that he received his credentials from Wellington's ministry and that he was in every way assisted by his government. Perhaps in view of England's interest in Texas at this time, Owen's scheme may have been regarded as a way to secure a foothold in that land. It does seem strange that Owen should have been taken in hand by Pakenham, British minister in Mexico, and also that he should have been given a British man-of-war to carry him to New Orleans after the Mexican mission.

For the details of the trip to Mexico, we have only Owen's account. It seems apparent that he landed first in Jamaica sometime late in the fall of 1828. For the first time he came into actual contact with negro slavery, an institution about to be abolished in British possessions. But Owen, though always solicitous for the welfare of the submerged classes, wrote in highly favorable terms of slavery as he saw it:

The slaves whom I saw on the island of Jamaica are better dressed, more independent in their look, person and manner, and are greatly more free from the corroding care and anxiety than a large portion of the working classes in England, Scotland and Ireland. What the condition of these slaves was in former times I know not. But I request with all the earnestness such a subject demands, that our good religious people in England will not attempt to disturb these slaves in the happiness and independence which they enjoy in their present condition. For while they are under humane masters—and almost all slave proprietors are now humane, for they know it to be to their interest to be so—the West Indian "slave" as he is called, is greatly more comfortable and happy than the British or Irish operative manufacturer or day-labourer. These slaves are secure in sufficiency for the enjoyment of all animal wants, and they are, fortunately for themselves, in the present stage of society too ignorant to desire more. If this present condition should not be interfered with by the abolitionists on the one hand, and the religionists on the other, these slaves cannot fail to be generally the happiest members of society for many years to come—until knowledge can be no longer kept from them.⁵

These words are in strange contrast to his general social philosophy. Here Owen seems to express himself in favor of ignorance;

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *British Co-operator*, pp. 93–94, 1830. Also in *Mr. Owen's Memorial to the Republic of Mexico and a Narrative of the Proceedings Thereon*.

he, the very high priest of education, pronounces himself a convert to the cult of simplicity.

In Jamaica Owen ran into a friend, Admiral Fleming, who commanded the fleet in Port Royal harbor. The Admiral gave him a letter of introduction to the Bishop of Puebla and promised to send a ship for him when he was ready to leave Mexico. In talking to Admiral Fleming, Owen admitted two difficulties: one was to secure introductory letters to the powers of the church in Mexico, and the other was to get a boat at Vera Cruz to take him to New Orleans, after he was finished in Mexico City, in time for his debate with Campbell in Cincinnati. Fleming said he was well acquainted with the Bishop of Puebla, who was then the only bishop in Mexico. Fleming had taken him from Old to New Spain before he was bishop. He was now head of the church in Mexico, and Fleming offered to give Owen letters of introduction to him. But the matter of the boat would "depend upon circumstances." If the "public service" would permit him to send a ship to Vera Cruz and from there directly to New Orleans, and if it could be done "compatibly with the good of the service," he would send the ship and let Owen know in time for him to come from Mexico City to Vera Cruz.

After landing in Vera Cruz, Owen was provided with "a litera drawn by two mules, with two mounted muleteers, who could not speak a word of English, and he knew not a word of Spanish. . . ." But without serious mishap he at length arrived at Jalapa, where he met Maclure of New Harmony. The two men, once doubtful friends but now meeting on foreign soil, clasped hands without reservation. Both were now cultivating their philanthropic schemes far away from New Harmony.

Maclure had apparently still retained his faith in Owen's plan of salvation for the world; for we find him writing to Poinsett on Owen's behalf:

Mr. Owen, whose general character you are no doubt acquainted with, came in the British packet with recommendatory letters to a great many of the authorities here from some of the most influential rulers of Britain. Of the great utility of his plans and principles to humanity I am perfectly convinced and went so far towards encouraging the experiment at New Harmony as to put upwards of 90,000 dollars of my fortune out of a productive fund into the less profitable of land and houses at a price far above their value. This same conviction of the vast benefit to society such a change as

he contemplates would produce has rather increased than diminished, since we only differ on the means of accomplishing it. He prefers the herculean task of convincing the rulers and higher orders of society that it is to their interest to promote his reforms. All my experience has taught me that adults are far beyond the influence of individual exertion and are put past redemption by the fake education they have been skilled to, while the pliability and placid nature of their intellect permitted all kind of impressions to take deep root with their conviction.⁶

Owen also met a young man from Hamburg by the name of Robert Haven, who offered his services as an interpreter. Thus equipped, he pushed along to Peroté, where he met General Santa Anna. That political adventurer, destined to bring much grief to his people, had just managed the election of Guerrero to the presidency. He received Owen, if we are to believe Owen, with extreme courtesy, introducing him to members of his staff and other officers in his army. The general provided him with an escort of cavalry. And so Owen in great exaltation of spirit made his way to Puebla, where the bishop lived.

Without delay, Owen, accompanied by his interpreter, drove to the bishop's palace and straightway proceeded to convert him to his view of society. Not only did Owen persuade the churchman that society was on the eve of revolutionary changes, but he also convinced the bishop that the great Catholic Church was about to undergo liberalization and secularization of its property. Finally the bishop agreed to head a mission to Rome, if necessary, for the purpose of bringing about more friendly relations between the people and the government of the Church.⁷ Of course, all this is according to Owen's story. The bishop no doubt was much concerned over secularization but probably did not view its advent with anything but alarm.

From Puebla, Owen serenely moved upon the capital itself. He placed himself in the hands of the British minister Pakenham, who procured him an audience with Victoria, the President. According to Owen's account, Pakenham made a long speech of presentation, in which he extolled the work done by the philanthropist at New Lanark and elsewhere. When he had finished, Victoria declared that his government had already taken under

⁶ Letter of William Maclure to Joel Poinsett, January 31, 1829, in *Poinsett Papers*, V.

⁷ See "Memoranda Relative to Robert Owen," *New Moral World*, I, 377-379 (September 26, 1835).

consideration the subject of a grant to Owen, as the Mexican minister in London had sent Owen's memorial and "other favourable documents" concerning Owen. The government had reached the conclusion that the province of Texas could not be granted, because it constituted a state whose territory could not be alienated under the constitution. But the President added:

If Mr. Owen will accept the government of a much more important territory, which is under the control and at the disposal of the general government, we have come to the unanimous decision to offer it to him for the great and good purposes stated in the memorial which he sent to us. It is a district extending from the Gulph of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, and of considerable breadth along the whole line which divides the United States of North America from the states of the confederacy of Mexico—and the government of this extensive district, fourteen or fifteen hundred miles long, we now freely offer him.⁸

After the President's offer had been explained to Owen, the latter made the objection that, inasmuch as the religion of Mexico was Roman Catholic to the exclusion of all others, it would be impossible for him to carry out his great project without religious toleration. The President immediately replied:

We have, as a Government, taken that subject into full consideration; we thought it might be an objection; we intend, at the Congress now near at hand, to propose, as a Government measure, that religion shall be made as free in the Mexican States as it is now in the North American States.⁹

Such is Owen's account of his interview with the President. One may well doubt that Victoria so readily offered territory to Owen. No other record of the interview has been preserved, and no doubt it is a case where Owen, ever believing in his cause, failed to make allowances for Latin politeness.

Of course Owen met Joel Poinsett, American minister to Mexico, who at first smelled a British plot for land in the scheme but apparently soon came to the realization that Owen was a harmless dreamer. The latter wrote in high praise of Poinsett's political acumen. Indeed, the American minister's interest in Mexican politics was such as to bring about his recall from Mexico. Owen's enthusiasm for the minister might have been due to the warm praise he gave to the famous principles. In conversation with Poinsett, Owen had accused both Great Britain and the United States of quarrelling like tradesmen, an attitude which was carried to the extreme

⁸ *Ibid.* ⁹ *Ibid.*

in Mexico. He had stated that a better understanding and more dignified conduct should exist between the two governments and their representatives so that they could influence for good all the other nations. Poinsett is reported to have said he had long seen the error of their proceedings and would end such conduct if he could; but mutual antagonism was the policy of both governments at present. Owen, encouraged, then gave Poinsett his views for the reconciliation of the two nations. Poinsett is quoted as saying that he would go to any lengths to end the petty national bickerings so that the results which Owen promised could be attained and that they would be attained if the powers of Europe and America would honestly adopt Owen's principles. According to Owen, Poinsett declared: "for the establishment of principles and practice, as they are explained in the manuscript, I will make any sacrifices, and go hand and heart with you in every measure, that is calculated to produce so much good to the human race."¹⁰

Owen and Poinsett thereupon had frequent meetings together to determine the best way to bring about union between Britain and the United States. Owen requested Poinsett to give him letters of introduction to President Jackson and to Martin Van Buren, although he knew them both. But he wanted Poinsett to refer in these letters to his, Owen's, ideas for effecting harmony between Great Britain and the United States. And Poinsett did so.

Having finished his business with the Mexican government, Owen started for Vera Cruz. He had received dispatches from Admiral Fleming saying that a ship would await him there. On the way down, he met Santa Anna again at Jalapa. This time he was given the opportunity to present his plan to the general and his officers. As usual, Owen wrote that they were much taken with his project and asked to have copies of his work translated into Spanish and circulated throughout the republic. Owen also explained to Santa Anna his plans for his new government on the border. The general was so enthusiastic about them that he told Owen to consider him his agent in Mexico to carry out his plans there. He wanted Owen to give him instructions from time to time as to what Owen wanted done to help promote his principles. Santa Anna declared he was desirous of doing whatever he could to help

¹⁰ "Review of Robert Owen's Concluding Speech," *Western Monthly Review*, III, 132-145 (September, 1829).

his country, and he believed that Owen's principles, if put into practice, would aid Mexico.

At Vera Cruz Owen boarded the "Fairy," the ten-gun brig sent by Admiral Fleming to convey him to New Orleans. Needless to state, he converted the captain of the ship to his social views. After a pleasant voyage, he reached New Orleans, whence he took a river steamboat for New Harmony.

By April 10, 1829, Owen was in Cincinnati ready for the debate with Campbell, an account of which will be given elsewhere. Immediately after the close of the debate, Owen visited Washington again. This time he was to take a hand at settling some of the points of difference between the United States and Great Britain.

Owen tells us that he saw the possibility of the United States and Great Britain being drawn into war as the result of unsettled boundary disputes and unhappy trade relations. He visioned the two as standing together for the maintenance of peace and good will. With such an ideal in mind, he sought an interview with Martin Van Buren, Secretary of State in the cabinet of Andrew Jackson.

Jackson had just taken office, and, if we are to believe Owen, he seemed particularly anxious to establish more friendly relations with Great Britain. His whole background of conflict with the English, from his childhood to manhood, was such as to make him antagonistic toward that country. He was well aware, too, that Englishmen looked upon him as their enemy. But when Van Buren presented Owen to the victor of New Orleans, the latter had this to say, according to Owen:

The British have thought me their enemy, and opposed to them; but they are mistaken. I wish to be upon the most friendly terms with them, and to unite the two countries in the closest bonds of amity. I wish that we should act rationally together, promote each other's welfare and interest, and put an end to the petty opposition which has hitherto been the practice between the two countries. If the British will meet us in the spirit of peace, of good faith, and sincerity, we are ready to adopt the policy now recommended, and to become permanently united, to support the cause of national liberty between them.¹¹

It is very possible that Jackson did make such a speech to Owen. There can be no question about his desire to settle the problem of

¹¹ "Memoranda Relative to Robert Owen," *New Moral World*, I, 394 (October 10, 1835).

American exclusion from West Indian commerce and to bring about a reciprocal trade agreement with Britain. In his first inaugural Jackson said:

With Great Britain, alike distinguished in peace and war, we may look forward to years of peaceful, honorable and elevated competition. Everything in the condition and history of the two nations is calculated to inspire sentiments of mutual respect and to carry conviction to the minds of both that it is their policy to preserve the most cordial relations.¹²

After being almost constantly in the company of Van Buren for several days, and after dining with the President and Van Buren, Owen was provided with letters to Louis McLane, American minister to England. But first of all, it was understood that Owen should interview Lord Aberdeen, British foreign minister. On Owen's return to England, he met the Earl of Aberdeen, who announced his willingness to negotiate with the United States through McLane.

From Owen's account of his diplomatic activities, one is led to believe that everything was straightway settled to the satisfaction of all concerned. But the West Indies were opened to American trade only after many months and not until Congress had passed a measure offering to grant similar privileges to British ships when England's restrictions were removed.

Meantime, news came to Owen that the Mexican Congress had failed to pass the measure of religious toleration which he desired. So ended a remarkable chapter in the history of Owen's life.

¹² Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, II, 443.

CHAPTER XV

GOD AND THE NEW SOCIAL SYSTEM

YOUNG AMERICA was all aflutter in the spring of 1829. Andrew Jackson, triumphant over his enemies, was inaugurated President amidst scenes of riotous democracy, while far and wide over the republic spread the news that an atheist and a Christian were to meet in debate at Cincinnati.

Owen, fresh from his Mexican adventure, stepped from a river steamer onto the landing at Cincinnati several days before the date set for the beginning of the battle. It was glorious spring weather. The yellow water of the Ohio, then at the flood, fairly boiled as it rolled along toward the Mississippi. Countless columns of smoke arose from the chimneys of packing houses, foundries, and small manufacturing plants. Perhaps Owen thought of Manchester when he felt the hurry and bustle of this rapidly growing city.

It did not seem fitting that a debate on Christianity should be held in such a town. Certainly it must have seemed incongruous to Mrs. Trollope, who knew only too well the intellectual limitations of its inhabitants. But Boston, the Athens of America, would never have tolerated such blasphemy. Then too, Cincinnati—a frontier town reeking with odors of the pork packing houses—had developed a ruggedness in religion that made it possible to bring such discussions out into the open.

Though interest was high and rising, there were many who thought it unseemly that the truths of Christianity should be subjected to the attack of anyone—not even “Mr. Owen.” The editor of *Niles Weekly Register* declared the public would not approve of such a debate.¹ Others, expressing the strong religious bias of the time, tore into Owen for his presumption. The *Literary Digest*, a journal published at Oxford, Ohio, by the faculty of Miami University, had much to say on the debate. It ridiculed Owen for stopping at the denial of the existence of a Creator; he should have denied the existence of all creatures. It also added the following:

There are some things which meet us in our intercourse with mankind, that are adapted to excite laughter and indignation at the same moment. What a

¹ See the *Niles Weekly Register*, XXXVI, 134 (April 25, 1829).

pack of fools and idiots must not Robert Owen, and Robert Dale Owen, and Paul Brown, and James Richards, et id genus omne, believe the inhabitants of the Western wilds to be, that *they* should take upon themselves the office of instructing us!!! Robert Owen, by a lucky marriage with the daughter of a person in whose service he was employed, arrived at the possession of wealth; and with property, came its usual effects upon weak, ignorant men, who obtain it by accident;—he suddenly imagines himself destined to be a great reformer, and from his want of knowledge, in some measure incident to his previous situation in life, delivers as “new views,” what has been published for ages. Robert Dale Owen, we would humbly suggest, might be profitably employed in the schools for infants, which our age has seen rise up, until he has made himself master of so much metaphysics as may be there acquired; and then we shall think it less presumption in him to write on subjects, which he does not understand. As to Paul Brown, James Richards, and other heroes, we know of nothing more suitable, than the remedy for all atheists, “a shaven head, a blistering cap, a straight waistcoat and a maniac’s cell.”²

It was not easy to find a place adequate to hold the crowds expected for the debate. The managers of the contest approached the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, but that gentleman was not disposed to harbor such an affair; therefore they turned to the Methodists, who were more pliable, with the result that their “Stone Chapel” was secured. The building held only a thousand people, but apparently all standing room was taken when the debate got under way.

The first meeting took place on Monday morning, April 13. The *Western Monthly Review* reported a great crowd of all ages and both sexes eager to listen to the widely heralded dispute.³ A special platform had been built for the moderators, who were well-known citizens and included in their number the Reverend Timothy Flint, editor of the *Western Monthly Review*. On the platform with the debaters sat Campbell’s father, a strikingly venerable figure, while down in the audience sat Mrs. Trollope, who wrote her impressions of that first day of the debate:

When Mr. Owen rose, the building was thronged in every part; the audience, or congregation (I hardly know which to call them), were of the highest rank of citizens, and as large a proportion of best bonnets fluttered there as the “two-horned church”⁴ itself could boast

² Robert Dale Owen, “Regarding Two Paragraphs by One of the Professors of the Miami University,” *New Harmony Gazette*, III, 310–311 (July 23, 1828).

³ See “Public Challenged Dispute between Robert Owen . . . and Rev. Alexander Campbell . . .,” *Western Monthly Review*, II, 639–647 (April, 1829).

⁴ So called because it possessed two spires.

It was in the profoundest silence and apparently with the deepest attention, that Mr Owen's opening address was received; and surely it was the most singular one that ever Christian men and women sat to listen to.

When I recollect its object, and the uncompromising manner in which the orator stated his mature conviction that the whole history of the Christian mission was a fraud, and its sacred origin a fable, I cannot but wonder that it was so listened to; yet at the time I felt no such wonder. Never did any one practice the *suaviter in modo* with more powerful effect than Mr Owen. The gentle tone of his voice; his mild, sometimes playful, but never ironical manner; the absence of every vehement or harsh expression; the affectionate interest expressed for "the whole human family;" the air of candour with which he expressed his wish to be convinced he was wrong, if he indeed were so—his kind smile—the mild expression of his eyes—in short, his whole manner, disarmed zeal, and produced a degree of tolerance that those who did not hear him would hardly believe possible.⁵

In that first speech Owen laid down his famous "Twelve Laws," and in the next eight days his hearers were destined to hear them explained over and over again. Reduced to their fighting dress, they stood about as follows: Man is entirely a creature of his environment. Everything he is and everything he believes is the result of the "circumstances" he is placed in. Free will is an illusion, and therefore no merit can be attached to believing or disbelieving or to so-called meritorious action. But Owen, after he had made this discovery as to the nature of man, made the further discovery that man could be molded by a system of education into anything desired.

Campbell, the moderators, and the audiences from day to day, could not see what the "Twelve Laws" had to do with the falseness of the Christian religion which Owen had undertaken to prove. But he felt, no doubt, that if he showed man's religious beliefs to be the result of his social environment and that environment varied in different parts of the world, producing Mohammedanism in one place, Confucianism in another, and Christianity in still another, these religions must all be false. At least they could not be the revealed word of God. They were merely accidents of certain circumstances which Owen believed to be very bad.

Owen knew nothing of comparative religions. His knowledge of the Bible was exceedingly limited. He made no attempt to question the authorities that Campbell thrust at him without ceasing. But he did ridicule the miraculous element in the Christian reli-

⁵ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, p. 123.

gion and did appeal to reason; thus he stood out as a child of the eighteenth century—an intellectual descendant of Paine and Godwin.

Campbell declared that he had spent a year in preparation for the debate. And from the amount of erudition he displayed, there can be little question of the truth of his statement. But it was all lost on Owen, who never made any attempt at meeting his opponent in argument. Probably Campbell had gained the idea that Owen was a scholar from Owen's oft repeated boast that he had read five hours a day for twenty years.

If Owen was not a scholar, he had a certain shrewdness that could be quite devastating. At one stage in the debate Owen disposed of Campbell's theological learning by the following remarks :

I am also much indebted to my friend, Mr. Campbell, for his learned dissertation upon the opinions of others, for I did not trouble myself very much about a knowledge, in detail, of these opinions before. My researches were not in that direction, after I ascertained they contained so little really useful practical information. The object I had in view compelled me to become a practical man, "to study from the life, and in the original peruse mankind." I have totally avoided metaphysical reading, because I discovered it was not calculated to relieve society from its errors and difficulties; it has too many words and too few facts.⁶

On another occasion Owen became more emphatic in his denunciation of metaphysical writings. After speaking of how the human mind was deranged by reading such stuff, he declared :

It were happy for mankind if they could all be collected in one heap—with fire placed under it, so that it might be consumed until not a fragment was left. The conflagration would be the greatest blessing that could now be conferred upon the human family.⁷

And so Owen, the gentle vandal, marched on through the days of the debate striking out now and then at the "superstitions" of the faithful; but for the most part he concerned himself only with pointing out to the benighted ones the glories of the new rational system. Time and time again he was pulled up by Campbell and the moderators for not keeping to his assigned task of demolishing Christianity, but Owen just as often would smile ever so pleasantly and ask them to bear up with him until he had led them into a full

⁶ Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity* . . . , I, 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 153.

view of his system. Once they comprehended the unanswerable truths of his "Twelve Laws," he argued, then the absurdity of their old beliefs about religion would be clear to them.

Campbell early in the debate saw the futility of getting Owen to come to hand strokes with him. "I have a strong misgiving," he drawled out in nasal tones, "that Mr. Owen is about to give us a view or theory of the world, as foreign to the appropriate subject now before the meeting, as would be the history of a tour up the Ganges."⁸

But Owen, not the least disturbed, kept on reading day after day until he had placed his "System" before his audiences. On one day he shocked his hearers by taking a fling at marriages:

The invention of unnatural marriages has been the sole origin of all sexual crimes. They have rendered prostitution unavoidable. They have erected spurious chastity and destroyed all knowledge of pure chastity. For real chastity consists, in connexion with affection, and prostitution, in connexion without affection.⁹

At times Owen grew oracular. He declared in all seriousness that the debate in Cincinnati had ushered in the "first period in the history of man, when truths the most simple in their nature, and the most important to the happiness and well-being of man, could publicly be spoken. There never has been any antecedent time, in the history of any country," he stated, "in which any individual has been permitted to speak as I have done."¹⁰

Campbell, anxious to explode Owen as an oracle and prophet, reminded him of his prediction "that Cincinnati would become a deserted or evacuated city before two years; that the citizens would all migrate to New Harmony."¹¹

When Owen drew away from his denunciations of religions to a consideration of economic problems, he spoke as one inspired. After calling attention to the vast increase of productive power by the application of the new technological processes, he declared:

There will soon be so much real wealth produced, by the daily multiplying labor-saving machines, that nations will be no longer competent to prosecute any of their present measures with success. This wealth will accumulate, and become as an impassable mountain barrier to permanent prosperity. It has

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

already, in your technical phrase, overstocked many, and soon it will oversupply all markets; and require, in consequence, more and more exertion from the working and middle classes, to enable them to live.

These are the signs of the times. I wish your eyes could be opened, to enable you to perceive these things even a little way off; for they are, while I speak, but a short distance from us. I see it in the smoke of your new factories before me. I hear it in the strokes of your heavy hammers, mechanically moved, which now din upon the ear. This is one reason why this discussion is so necessary at this period. It well merits a public contest, to ascertain what that change, which all things indicate to be so near at hand, shall be;—whether it shall return back to the superstition and ignorance of the dark ages; or proceed forward, to bring into full practice, physically, mentally, and morally, the discoveries and improvements of the past ages, for the benefit of the human race.¹²

But his audience was not interested in his economic ideas. In fact, Americans of that day were not touched by economic questions. At every gathering, at the crossroads or in a village hall, men talked politics or religion. It is true that there were roads to be built, canals dug, and land cleared; but these activities might well be neglected in a country so rich and productive. In any case, Americans of the 'twenties and 'thirties delighted in long sermons and political harangues.

One Thursday afternoon after the debate had been running several days, Owen in a somewhat playful mood painted a picture of death that sent a wave of horror over the audience, according to the writer in Flint's *Western Monthly Review*.

"The particles which compose my body," said the philosopher, "are eternal. They had no beginning and can have no end. I shall be decomposed, and lose my consciousness in death, to be recomposed, and to reappear in new forms of life and enjoyment." At least he could not be charged with disguise or reservation; but came out with gratuitous plainness, in the most revolting and desultory tenets of the creed of the everlasting sleep of death. As he uttered this a general revulsion of horror passed across the countenance of the crowded audience.¹³

Sometimes Owen's hearers grew a bit obstreperous, especially when he became quite frank in his denunciation of Christianity and Christians. Toward the end of the debate, after the "Twelve Laws" had been more than adequately explained, Owen opened up by declaring that Christianity was not of divine origin, not true, and not beneficial to humanity. But this was not all he had to say

¹² *Ibid.*, II, 152-153.

¹³ *Western Monthly Review*, II, 251 (April, 1829).

on the subject. From generalities he came down with shocking suddenness to particulars :

My friends, would you not suppose, from what you have heard of the practical advantages of christianity, that all is now right amongst you; that you are very angels in conduct; that you have among you the very perfection of virtue and of all excellence? But you all well know this is not the case. You well know that christian society, all over christendom, abounds in vice and iniquity. [*Here there was some stir among the audience.*] My friends, if any of you are afraid to hear the truth, it is time for you to depart. [*Here a little more excitement, and some few left the church.*]¹⁴

Owen's blunt criticism created a small riot in the church. Some ladies were hurt in the scramble to leave the place out of protest at the speaker's sharp language. But Owen kept on with his attack, calling attention to the undemocratic character of the weekly preachings in which the minister gives the congregation no chance to reply to him.¹⁵

But in the end Owen always softened the hard things he had said by adding that all of us are what we are because of circumstances and no blame should be attached to the individual. Campbell, he often asserted with a gentle smile, was in no wise responsible for being a Christian.

The biological difficulties that Owen might have urged against a literal interpretation of the Scriptures were not part of his stock in trade. He used none of the arguments against Campbell so effectively employed by Clarence Darrow in his tilt with William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes trial. Of course Campbell gave a very orthodox view of the Bible and laid himself wide open to attack, but the debate was in the days before the evolutionary hypothesis had come upon the scene.

It was a long debate with only a few dramatic moments, but the audiences were tremendously patient. How they endured the eight days of intellectual punishment is beyond present-day understanding. Perhaps the long sermons and the dreary editorials had disciplined them to such fortitude. Certainly no modern audience ever would have sat through even one of the meetings.

On the last day when both sides had exhausted themselves, Campbell sprang a surprise. The audience had arisen with the

¹⁴ Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, II, 143.

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 145.

apparent intention of leaving the church when Campbell stepped out and asked them all to be seated.

Every one in a moment sat down in profound stillness.

"You," said he, "who are willing to testify that you bore the gratuitous vilification of your religion, not from indifference or skepticism, but from the Christian precept to be patient and forbearing under indignity—you who prize the Christian religion, either from a belief in it, or a reverence for its influences, be pleased to rise." Instantly, as by one electric movement, almost every person in the assembly sprang erect. "Gentlemen," he continued, "now please be seated." All again were seated in almost breathless expectation. "You," said he, "who are friendly to Mr. Owen's system, be good enough to rise." It was almost with a shiver, that we saw three or four rise from the mass to this unenviable notoriety. The people resumed their character as sovereigns, for a moment. A loud and instant clapping and stamping raised a suffocating dust to the roof of the church.¹⁸

Owen was not greatly disturbed. He merely bowed and smiled, giving evidence now and then of a little perplexity at this sudden maneuver. But Campbell, long practiced in Kentucky campaigning strategy, knew only too well how to give his cause the air of a triumph.

And so the debate came to an end with the victory of Christianity over infidel Owen. There was nothing now for Owen to do but return to England. He had come with a message of salvation for America, but she too turned a deaf ear to him.

¹⁸ Timothy Flint, "Public Challenged Dispute between Robert Owen . . . and Rev. Alexander Campbell . . .," *Western Monthly Review*, II, 639-647 (April, 1829).

CHAPTER XVI

INTO THE WHIRLWIND

WHILE OWEN toiled to make his dream world a reality in America, England was deep in change. The great energies unleashed by the Industrial Revolution tore to bits the old order based upon the landed aristocracy. Indeed, the years following the close of the Napoleonic wars were without a parallel in the long history of the island kingdom. Everywhere machinery poured forth an abundance of goods; everywhere poverty and hunger stalked.

In earlier times when the poor cried for bread, men looked about and said: "It is the bad crops that bring us to this want." Or perhaps the wars were blamed. But now the causes seemed more remote. The fields yielded bountiful harvests; the mills, equipped with the most cunning machinery, rolled out goods in magnificent profusion; the country was at peace; yet the army of unemployed marched in ever increasing numbers. Such was the paradox that confronted Englishmen. Some said the currency was to blame; others called attention to the unequal distribution of the new wealth. Their numbers were legion who blamed the oligarchy of Tories which constituted the government of England. The causes given for the distress were as numerous as the witch doctors who offered cures.

It was this paradox of starvation and want amidst plenty that Owen sought to solve. Believing absolutely in the efficiency of reason to conquer the problems of society, he refused to bow before the inevitableness of poverty. He looked upon poverty as the result of an irrational social order to be entirely eliminated by the application of his well-known remedies.

Robert Dale Owen, in writing of the diminished income of the working classes after the advent of the Industrial Revolution, explained his father's attitude toward the problem:

As a cure for such evil and suffering, my father found the political economists urging a reduction of taxes. But his experience taught him to regard that as a mere temporary palliative. The very reduction of government burdens might be taken as an all-sufficient plea for the further reduction of wages. Labour could be afforded for less. And down to the very point at which

it can be afforded,—which means at that point on the road to famine at which men are not starved suddenly, but die slowly of toil inadequately sustained by scanty and unwholesome food,—down to that point of bare subsistence my father saw the labourer of Britain thrust. How? Wherefore? By what leger-demain of cruelty and injustice?

Thus the problem loomed upon him. We may imagine his reflections. Why, as the world advances in knowledge and power, do the prospects and the comforts of the mass of mankind darken and decline? How happens it that four or five centuries have passed over Britain, bringing peace where raged feuds and forays, affording protection to person and property, setting free the shackled press, spreading intelligence and liberality, reforming religion and fostering civilization,—how happens it that these centuries of improvement have left the British labourer twofold more the slave of toil than they found him? Why must mechanical inventions—inevitable even if they were mischievous, and in themselves a rich blessing as surely as they are inevitable—stand in array *against* the labourer, instead of toiling by his side?

Momentous questions these! My father pondered them day and night. If he had tersely stated the gist of his reflections,—which he was not always able to do,—they might have assumed some such form as this: Will any man, who stands on his reputation for sanity, affirm that the *necessary* result of over-production is famine? that because labour produces more than even luxury can waste, labour shall not have bread to eat? If we can imagine a point in the progress of improvement at which all the necessities and comforts of life shall be produced with out human labour, are we to suppose that the human labourer, when that point is reached, is to be dismissed by his masters from their employment, to be told that he is now a useless incumbrance which they cannot afford to hire?

If such a result be flagrantly absurd in the extreme, it was then, and is now, in Great Britain, a terrible reality in the degree. Men *were* told that machines had filled their places, and that their services were no longer required. Certain English economists scrupled not to avow the doctrine, that a man born into a world already occupied and overstocked with labour has no RIGHT to claim food; that such a one is a being superfluous on the earth, and for whom, at the great banquet of nature, there is no place to be found.

My father's conclusions from the data which I have here furnished were:—

1. That the enormously increased productive powers which man in modern times has acquired, involve, and, in a measure, necessitate, great changes in the social and industrial structure of society.

2. That the world has reached a point of progress at which co-operative industry should replace competitive labour.

3. That society, discarding large cities and solitary homes, should resolve itself into associations, each of fifteen hundred or two thousand persons, who should own land and houses in common, and labour for the benefit of the community. In this way (he believed) labour-saving power would directly aid, not tend to oppress, the workman.¹

¹ Robert Dale Owen, *Threading My Way*, pp. 223–225.

No one knew Owen better, no one has interpreted him more faithfully than his eldest son, Robert Dale. Why should men starve in a land of plenty? That was the question that he faced so boldly.

The generation that grew into manhood when Owen came forth with his plan of salvation knew much of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Both economists had preached the sacredness of private property, but they had also given much strength to those who attacked that institution. They, especially Ricardo, had emphasized the part played by labor in fixing exchange value. Thus laying down the labor theory of value had paved the way over which the socialists could walk. If labor produced all wealth, then labor should enjoy that wealth.

Not only did Ricardo strengthen the arm of those who struck at private property, but the tables of statistics turned out by Patrick Colquhoun made fine reading for those who would overthrow the capitalistic system.² His work showed that the United Kingdom, with a population in 1812 of 17,096,803, produced wealth amounting to about £430,500,000. This was a mighty increase over the closing decades of the eighteenth century, but the most optimistic Englishman could not help feeling disturbed over the distribution of the new wealth. A few figures tell the story. The aristocracy, composed of the higher and lower nobility and numbering 416,000 persons, received £58,000,000, an amount sufficient to give £100 to £400 a person. The people belonging to the class of the yeomanry, numbering 1,400,000 persons, received forty millions, or £20 to £50 each. The merchant class fared much better in receiving from £112 to £260 a person. But the saddest part of the tale comes when the agricultural laborers and the industrial workers of the cities are reached. These classes, according to Colquhoun's figures, received but £11 a person.³

Colquhoun's figures were convincing enough that something was wrong about the system of distribution. And when he, as well as Ricardo, emphasized that labor was the source of wealth, little more was needed to send the radicals, including Owen, into the forum. In fact, Owen was constantly using Colquhoun's figures to

² See Patrick Colquhoun, *Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire*, pp. 124-128.

³ See *Ibid.* These are Owen's interpretation of the figures given by Colquhoun. They have been checked against the original work by Colquhoun and are substantially correct.

drive home his arguments for communities. Yet Colquhoun, himself, fully justified the maldistribution of wealth.

While Smith, Ricardo, and Colquhoun unwittingly put arguments into the mouths of the revolutionary thinkers of Owen's day, Godwin consciously colored all of them. His emphasis was upon the life of reason, upon equality, and upon the perfectibility of man. Godwin's ideal was a society of free individuals where there was no government and where the slogan would be: "to each according to his needs."

Ricardo, Godwin, Cobbett, and a great host of lesser lights promised to give England a new day. And England, groping in the darkness of poverty and unemployment, needed the light. But somehow it came not. The laissez-faire philosophy of Smith, the anti-corn-law doctrine of Ricardo, the academic anarchism of Godwin, the figures of Colquhoun, and the political reform agitation of Cobbett all created a mighty stir. But the poor still marched in hunger through the streets. Then came Owen, the greatest of all the social messiahs of that day, and straightway the air became clearer.

Owen came back to stay in an England that was indeed torn by the winds of doctrine. During his brief sojourn in America, his own teachings were reborn in the minds of many devoted disciples. They went about among the lowly preaching the gospel of community life with the promise of educational opportunities for their children and abundance for all.

Among Owen's disciples in those early years, William Thompson stands out head and shoulders above the rest. He proved to be the St. John who gave to Owenism the philosophical form it needed. Thompson was a prosperous landed proprietor of County Cork in Ireland. He came to be deeply impressed by Owen's teachings and, after much wrestling with the spirit, produced a work which he gave the formidable title of *Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness*. He had started out by being attracted to Bentham, especially the Benthamite creed that happiness should be the end of all economic endeavor. He ended his quest for a way out by embracing Owen's philosophy that the coöperative life with the common ownership of property was the best means to attain happiness.

Thompson, in turning away from Bentham to join Owen, re-

garded the laborer as the real producer of wealth and therefore came to be intent on an economic system that would reward him. Thompson felt that the system of private property did not give to the real producers of wealth the security and reward to bring about an adequate production of goods. The goods that were produced went to a few in the form of rent and interest. He argued for equality in distribution not so much because it conformed to the facts of economics, but because equality would bring about greater happiness and greater utility. He practically admitted that the surplus value was produced by capital and not by labor.

In order to attain the very desirable end of happiness for the greatest number, Thompson advocated the formation of communities after the pattern of "Owen of New Lanark." His second work, *Labour Rewarded*, is devoted to this principle. Labor unions were to be the units out of which the new coöperative societies of production were to be built. The trade unions should save their money in good times and buy machinery and buildings so that the unemployed could be taken care of. He pointed out that labor, to be freed from the evils of the capitalistic system with its rents, profits, and interest, must seek to buy land and form general coöperative societies for the production of all their wants. By cooperative societies he meant communities of common ownership of property and mutual aid.

Thompson was very much in earnest and became one of the most active leaders in the numerous coöperative meetings and congresses held in the 'twenties and 'thirties. He was a member of the London Co-operative Society and a contributor to the *Co-operative Magazine*. When he died it was found that he had left all his property to be used in the furtherance of the movement toward communities.

Another follower of Owen, but not so profound a student of society as Thompson, was George Mudie. This man journeyed from Scotland to London, where he came to be editor of the *Economist*, a paper ultimately supported by the London printers and devoted to the cause of coöperation.

Mudie, like many other followers of Owen, regretted Owen's antireligious stand. Many years after Mudie had been active in the coöperative movement in London and at Orbiston, where he lost everything he possessed, he wrote a letter to Owen begging for help. Apparently his habits were irregular, and Owen in refusing

him aid reminded him of this. Mudie then wrote Owen a very plain letter in which he told him why his (Owen's) schemes had come to naught. He told Owen that his never-ending metaphysical discussions and arguments had worked mischief to the coöperative movement. He further declared that Owen had been all wrong about "equality and community of goods" and reminded him that Ricardo had run him into a corner.⁴

Though these hard words came from a disgruntled man, they have the ring of truth in them. Others wrote to Owen in the same vein.

Another Owenite in this period was John Minter Morgan, who wrote a book entitled *The Revolt of the Bees*, a popular work in interesting style and much in favor among the coöperators. Of course Owen was the "wise bee" who showed the unhappy bees the way out of their misery.⁵

Morgan looked upon society as a hive of bees which had strayed from the natural order of communal life to one of private property with all its selfishness, misery, and crime. After a time a clever bee invented a contrivance by which honey and wax could be made with far fewer workers. Other bees followed in the footsteps of the ingenious bee with the result that thousands of workers were thrown out of employment. Confronted with this problem, the bees who had adopted the profession of political economy stepped forward and declared that the distress of unemployment could only be relieved by greater accumulations of honey in the hands of the few who were very rich. At this juncture one of the cleverest of the drones came out with the bold doctrine that all the misery and trouble was due to the great increase in numbers of the workers. He declared in a loud voice that no matter how much honey was produced the number of workers would increase still faster.

Faced with such pessimistic talk, the workers felt that suicide was the only course open to them. In the midst of their despair, out from the crowd of workers flew a wise and good bee who pointed the way to a better life. But his advice was not taken, for he was looked upon as a dreamer. Whereupon he flew off to a distant land for a time.

⁴ See letter of George Mudie to Robert Owen, August 29, 1828, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

⁵ See Max Beer, *History of British Socialism*, I, 228-229.

This was Morgan's way of explaining the social conditions following the Napoleonic wars and the advance of the Industrial Revolution. Owen was the prophet of hope who came to hearten the workers after the chilly pessimism of Malthus and his supporters. There can be no doubt Owen did that very thing: he brought hope at a time of despair. He set thousands adreaming with him—dreaming of a better England.

John Francis Bray was another follower of Owen who saw in coöperation the remedy for the evils of the time. His work *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy* gives an analysis of the evils characteristic of capitalistic society and at the same time offers the way out.

The way out was not to organize communities with common ownership of property at the start. Human nature, he felt, was too much depraved by the economic system based upon profits, rent, and interest to make such communities a success. He advocated, rather, the organization of joint stock companies of workers who would operate the production and distribution system of the entire country. They would be rewarded by wages paid according to the time spent in productive work. His scheme has some of the same characteristics put forth by the Soviets in the early stages of Russian communism.

In the crowd of Owen's disciples stood John Gray, who also wrote against the competitive system. He joined Combe at Orbiston and finally in his book, *Social System*, came to be a vigorous advocate of labor exchanges. His experience at Orbiston and the failures of other communities made him wary of applying socialism to production.

Many others, moved by the gentle, smiling "Mr. Owen of New Lanark" with his gospel of hope, raised their voices in protest against an order that condemned countless thousands of Englishmen to a life of hopeless poverty and ignorance. For it must be remembered that Owen preached not only a gospel of economic plenty, but, more than that, he brought a message of light for those denied educational opportunities.

While Owen importuned the rich and mighty in England, Ireland, and America, little bands of his humble followers met in empty lofts and shabby halls. Like the early Christians, they planned to carry on the principles of their teacher by forming

communities of mutual aid and coöperation where their children might be educated. The great problem before all of them was how to accumulate the necessary capital. But many little groups with ardent zeal saved their pennies, hoping that some day their ideal would be realized.

One of the first societies was formed as the result of the enthusiastic work of George Mudie. In 1821 he persuaded some printers in London to establish the Economical and Co-operative Society. The immediate object of the society was to buy food, clothing, and other necessities at wholesale prices; but the ultimate object was to establish a "village of Unity and Mutual Co-operation." For a few months it flourished, and then came complete silence. It had failed from lack of funds, so Robert Southey declared.⁶

It was followed by the London Co-operative Society, organized in 1824, and then came a long roll of others. Some reached the stage where their members lived together in common quarters, sharing the same kitchen and thus seeking to attain in a small way the Owenite ideal. But more of them never reached their goal of communism; they stopped at coöperative buying, hoping to gain enough capital by their savings to enter into the promised land.

The story of the London Co-operative Society is one of a few enthusiastic Owenites gathering together to form a true community. They held meetings and social festivals at their rooms in Burton Street, Burton Crescent, London. Later they moved to Red Lion Square, where they continued to be a center of propaganda for years. The society published the *Co-operative Magazine* and *Monthly Herald*—a journal devoted to coöperation.

Owen, himself, often came to their social festivals, where he beamed in a most benevolent fashion upon the admiring throng. Sometimes he gave lectures on the "New System," when a great crowd would gather eager for his message.

The society also promoted debates and discussions which created no little stir. Soon they found it necessary to hire the "Crown and Rolls" in Chancery Lane; and it was there the Owenites came to battle with a group of intellectuals, including John Stuart Mill. In his *Autobiography*, Mill tells of their discussions:

There was for some time in existence a society of Owenites, called the Co-operative Society, which met for weekly public discussions in Chancery

⁶ See Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More, or Colloquies*, I, 139.

Lane. In the early part of 1825, accident brought Roebuck in contact with several of its members, and led to his attending one or two of the meetings and taking part in the debate in opposition to Owenism. Some one of us started the notion of going there in a body and having a general battle: and Charles Austin and some of his friends who did not usually take part in our joint exercises, entered into the project. It was carried out by concert with the principal members of the Society, themselves nothing loth, as they naturally preferred a controversy with opponents to a tame discussion among their own body. The question of population was proposed as the subject of debate: Charles Austin led the case on our side with a brilliant speech, and the fight was kept up by adjournment through five or six weekly meetings before crowded auditories, including along with the members of the Society and their friends, many hearers and some speakers from the Inns of Court. When this debate was ended, another was commenced on the general merits of Owen's system: and the contest lasted about three months. It was a *lutte corps à corps* between Owenites and political economists, whom the Owenites regarded as their most inveterate opponents: but it was a perfectly friendly dispute. We who represented political economy, had the same objects in view as they had, and took pains to show it; and the principal champion on their side was a very estimable man, with whom I was well acquainted, Mr. William Thompson, of Cork, author of a book on the Distribution of Wealth, and of an "appeal" in behalf of women against the passage relating to them in my father's Essay on Government. Ellis, Roebuck, and I took an active part in the debate, and among those from the Inns of Court who joined in it, I remember Charles Villiers. The other side obtained also, on the population question, very efficient support from without. The well-known Gale-Jones, then an elderly man, made one of his florid speeches; but the speaker with whom I was most struck, though I dissented from nearly every word he said, was Thirlwall, the historian, since Bishop of St. David's, then a Chancery barrister, unknown except by a high reputation for eloquence acquired at Cambridge Union before the era of Austin and Macaulay. His speech was in answer to one of mine. Before he had uttered ten sentences, I set him down as the best speaker I had ever heard, and I have never since heard any one whom I placed above him.⁷

The society struggled along trying to raise money so that Owen's ideals could be put in practice. The members had set £50,000 as the goal, but after two years they had raised only four thousand. Some of the members grew impatient and formed another society, the Co-operative Community Fund Association, with the same ultimate aims; but their plan was to operate with a much smaller capital. The society proposed to raise a fund of £1,250 by selling fifty shares of £25 each. The shares were to be paid for on the installment plan—each member contributing at least four shillings

⁷ Pp. 82-83.

per week.⁵ This venture, like so many other similar ones, seems to have vanished into thin air.

In this time of sprouting communities, another organization came to life: the Union Exchange Society. The members of this ephemeral society met at 36 Red Lion Square, the headquarters of the London Co-operative Society, and sold each other such goods as tea, bread, flour, boots, shoes, clothes, umbrellas, carved and gilt articles, and brass and tinware. Ten per cent was levied on the gross sales to be put into a common fund and distributed to the members as profits after expenses of the building were deducted. For a time they did an increasing business; but, like all the rest, it passed away without any adequate explanation.

Far and wide the coöperative movement spread over the land. In Brighton an association was formed that lasted for several years and published a journal called the *Brighton Co-operator*. In Cork elaborate plans for a community were sketched, but they never went beyond the paper stage. Cooperative journals flourished and died, as might be expected. The *Co-operative Magazine* continued until 1830. In London appeared the *Co-operative Miscellany* and the *British Co-operator*. A little earlier came the organization of the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge. It came into being in response to the demands for information from several hundred newly formed societies.

William Thompson rode along on the wave of coöperative enthusiasm. He spoke at the congresses and aroused the jealousy of Owen. He also published a manual for the guidance of the new societies: *Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities*. In this work he laid down the principle that mutual production and trade should lead to the founding of complete coöperative communities as soon as they were able to save enough money out of trading. His idea of what a community should be followed somewhat closely the plan laid down by Owen. He did not hesitate to suggest the most minute and personal rules for the governance of the relationship between the sexes and the regulation of the birth rate.

In all this time Owen was bombarded with letters from eager would-be coöperators who wanted his blessing for their particular

⁵ See the *Co-operative Magazine*, I (no page or date given), cited by Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen*, II, 380.

schemes. He participated in the coöperative congresses held every six months starting with the spring of 1831. There were magnificent enthusiasm, vast plans, and very little money raised. Most of the societies never reached the community stage; but many of them did a little coöperative buying and selling, which was not altogether to the liking of "Mr. Owen of New Lanark."

In those years when community building was much talked of, Abram Combe, a Scotchman of independent means, came under the spell of Owen. The result was a book entitled *Metaphorical Sketches of the Old and the New System*. In this work he gave the parable of the Cistern. It was another indictment of the competitive capitalistic system with the coöperative system on the Owenite basis thrown in at the end as a cure.

After a number of short-lived experiments, Combe, whose whole character had been changed by his contact with Owen, launched out on the most ambitious experiment in community life thus far attempted in England. He, together with Archibald James Hamilton, founded the so-called Orbiston Community near Glasgow. Into Orbiston, Combe put £20,000, all the money he possessed. The scheme got under way about the same time that New Harmony was starting.

Combe's greatest mistake was the same as Owen made at New Harmony. He permitted the worthless and lazy to enter the community. But in so doing he was at least consistent with the principles of the new system. "We set out," he declared, "to overcome Ignorance, Poverty and Vice; it would be a poor excuse for failure to urge that the subjects of our experiment were ignorant, poor and vicious."⁹

Combe and his associates had secured an estate of 291 acres for the colony and started to work on a building designed to house 1,000 persons. It was to be four stories high and to consist of a center and two large wings. As it turned out, only one wing was completed with quarters for about 300 persons; but these quarters were arranged on a generous scale. Each adult was provided with a separate apartment, and common kitchens and dining rooms were constructed.

The plans for the comfort and well-being of the communists

⁹ *Orbiston Register*, I, 125 (no date given), cited by Frank Podmore, *op. cit.*, I, 360.

were indeed elaborate. Combe, a most ardent disciple of Owen, determined that no halfway measures would be employed. Education for the children was to be a most important part of the community life, even as Owen, his master, would have it.

By 1826, Combe had gathered together his people; and, though the buildings were by no means finished, the start was made. As might be expected, everything went wrong. Combe refused at first to use compulsion on the lazy and shiftless people who comprised his community. The result was that everyone did as little as possible. An example is given of the prevailing spirit in the preparation of ground for the planting of potatoes. One day in the early spring, twenty or thirty community members turned out to spade the ground for the planting. For an hour or so the work proceeded at a good pace; then weariness overtook them, and the work stopped altogether.

By summer the idealistic Combe realized that some of his fine principles must give way to measures more practical and energetic. He, therefore, organized his people into squads or companies for the carrying on of specific duties. There was the Garden Squad, the Dairy Squad, and a Building Company together with many others, all carrying on within the community. For a time, the enterprise seemed to have prospered.

At a meeting of the community held in September of 1826, a resolution was proposed and passed calling for unity in producing a common stock of goods out of which the common expenditures could be paid; but the surplus should be divided among the members according to the time occupied by each. Thus the important principle was laid down that equal pay for all kinds of labor should be given. The communist principle of "from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs" was not exactly carried out.

As the enterprise got under way, it appears that the more shiftless and unsocial members were eliminated; but many still remained whose conduct was far from exemplary. The *Orbiston Register*, organ of the community, reported that some of the members had turned in to the timekeeper fictitious accounts of hours worked. It also became the practice of many to work just enough to draw their full credit for food and clothing and to leave to others the problem of creating a surplus for the public good. From

available figures on the per capita consumption of those who ate at the common tables and those who drew out their food and prepared it themselves, it is clear that those who preferred to handle their own food were selling it or giving it to outsiders. Their consumption was certainly far ahead of those who dined at the common tables.

Around came the summer of 1827. Orbiston seemed to be in a fair way to success. Owen had visited it and had given his blessing to the community. Then fell disaster: Abram Combe died on August 11, 1827, supremely confident that his dream had been realized. For a few weeks the colony went on as before, now under the management of William Combe, his son. Then William struck with great suddenness upon the demand of those who had lent money to the community. He gave the members notice to quit the premises, and shortly thereafter the whole concern was put up at public auction. The success of the community was only external, only in the seeming. In reality, it had never been anything but insolvent. Combe's wife was left penniless, and Alexander Campbell, an ardent Owenite and backer of the scheme, went to jail to satisfy the vengeance of the creditors.

But coöperation went marching on pretty much undisturbed by the failures of New Harmony and Orbiston. And to Owen these failures were as unreal as goblins. While coöperation gathered speed, it was not the coöperation that Owen planned. There was, as he declared, "too much buying and selling in it." Indeed, as it developed it took on the characteristics of joint stock enterprises with the profits going to the shareholders; but the movement, nevertheless, has proved a boon to the masses, who have thus effected economies in buying necessities. Moreover, Owen was to live long enough to see the Rochdale Pioneers, members of his own cult, open their store in Toad Lane, thus starting a coöperative movement destined to attain vast proportions. And so it falls out in the affairs of men that they do other than they intend.

After his return from America in 1829, Owen was tremendously busy with meetings and his writings. He was far too occupied with his great cause to give much attention to his family. New Lanark saw him but seldom. His wife and three daughters, Anne, Jane, and Mary, were left to struggle along on a much diminished income; for Owen was now a comparatively poor man. The great

bulk of his fortune had gone into the New Harmony business, and the rest was soon to be engulfed in his labor exchanges and other experimental schemes.

On September 23, 1830, Owen's wife wrote him a pathetic letter reminding him of the approaching anniversary of their wedding.

I hope you will remember next Thursday, the day when we became *one*—thirty-one years ago, and I think from what I feel myself that we love one another as sincerely and understand one another much better than we did thirty-one years ago. My sincere wish is that nothing may ever happen to diminish that affection.¹⁰

In the same letter she told of their daughter Anne's sickness and the necessity of moving to more humble quarters. She declared that on her diminished income she could not afford more than £30 a year for rent. Mrs. Owen was paying the usual price for being the wife of a man who felt that his mission was to save humanity.

Mrs. Owen wrote her husband another letter on October 2, reporting that Anne was very ill.¹¹ But Owen, who was probably living in John Walker's house in Bedford Square, London, apparently thought his work more important, for he wrote to Jane a few days later expressing concern over Anne's health, but then he went on to tell Jane how busy he was with his plans. He disclosed to her that he was about to make public "the most important truths" at the City of London Tavern on Wednesday next. He was anxious to get the attention of the ministry, but he was afraid that the ignorant part of the aristocracy would prevent the government from acting.¹²

Anne died a few days later—Anne who was her father's devoted disciple. Just what she meant to him is best disclosed in a letter written to his son Robert a short time after her death:

There is no one with whom I have conversed whose judgment was more severely correct than her's upon all subjects connected with the improvement of the mind and dispositions. Whatever was calculated to assist her in the education of her pupils she studied with unabating interest; and even you would be surprised to hear of the number of works which she read to store her mind with useful facts on all subjects, for the benefit of those under her

¹⁰ In *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

¹¹ See *Ibid.*

¹² October 16, 1830, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

charge. She had patience, perseverance, an accurate knowledge of human nature; and took a degree of interest in the progress and happiness of her pupils such as I never saw equalled. Her little charge, Nora C——, who had the benefit of her more than maternal cares for about two years, is a striking proof of what may be effected by tuition. I have never seen a child at her age whose character has been so well formed. Even in those accomplishments which your sister herself had cared for and cultivated little in her own person, she continued to make little Nora a proficient; in dancing, for instance. She taught her to reason upon all subjects with a degree of correctness seldom attained to by those twice her age.¹³

The next spring, in 1831, Mrs. Owen died, and a year later, Mary, the youngest daughter, passed away. Jane, the only living daughter, joined her brothers in New Harmony, where she married Robert Fauntleroy. Just how these losses affected Owen it is difficult to determine. By 1830 he had apparently passed beyond the stage where mere personal losses counted in his life. He became now the embodiment of an idea. All his movements and every word he spoke were manifestations of that idea. Coöperatives, labor exchanges, communities, and trade-unions were mere attempts to find a material expression for the ideal rational society where abundance and happiness would prevail.

While his family at New Lanark was breaking up, Owen continued to bombard the government with letters and petitions. To the Duke of Wellington as prime minister he sent requests for a hearing, but the Duke's secretary always wrote back that His Grace could not see him.

The year 1832 was a memorable one for England. The agitation for parliamentary reform had now assumed revolutionary proportions. The shouting of the great captains of the people grew into a roar for parliamentary reform. William Cobbett, Francis Place, William Lovett, and Joseph Hume called out to Englishmen to follow them in a great attack upon privilege. But Owen stood high and calm above the battling hosts. In fact, he, looking down from the vast heights of the New Jerusalem, smiled with that patient smile of his always in evidence when men strayed out in false paths. Why storm and agitate about parliaments and such temporary devices as political reform when all these would be swept away at one stroke by the new social order?

In the midst of the uproar, Owen launched a journal with the

¹³ In the *Free Enquirer*, 2d series, III, 183 (April 2, 1831).

very fitting title of the *Crisis*. He brought Robert Dale Owen from America to help him with the editing. The prospectus given in the first issue was indeed formidable: "‘The Crisis’ will upon all occasions *discourage religious animosities, political rancour, and individual contention; its fixed purpose being to promote real charity, kindness, and union among all classes, sects, and parties.*"¹⁴

Coming down to particulars, the immediate aims were set forth: "We must not, however, conclude this Prospectus without stating, most distinctly and unequivocally, that one great object we have at heart, is first, *to put a stop to the rapid sinking of the Industrial Classes into poverty, crime, and wretchedness.*"¹⁵

Back of the *Crisis* stood the "Association of the Intelligent and Well-disposed of the Industrious Classes for Removing Ignorance and Poverty by Education and Employment." This organization, with such a vast and descriptive name, was the first of a long line of similar propaganda societies fabricated by Owen in the many years of his messiahship.

The Association established headquarters on Gray's Inn Road, London, under the name of the Institution of the Industrious Classes. Soon the Institution came to be the scene of moving enterprises. Owen lectured every Sunday to large and "respectable audiences." Social festivals were given monthly where crowds of working class and middle class people made merry until midnight, when Owen usually sent them home.

In the spring of 1832 the Third Co-operative Congress was held at the headquarters of the Institution. William Lovett, one of the delegates, in writing of the Congress declared:

We had much talk, but did very little business; the chief object of interest to many (that of forming an incipient community upon the plan of Mr. Thompson, of Cork) being stoutly opposed and finally marred by our friend Mr. Owen. . . .

After the proposal was discussed for some time, for commencing a community upon the small scale proposed by Mr. Thompson, instead of waiting for the grand plan of Mr. Owen, we retired for dinner. When we came back our friend Owen told us very solemnly, in the course of a long speech, that if we were resolved to go into a community upon Mr. Thompson's plan, we must make up our minds *to dissolve our present marriage connections, and go into it as single men and women.* This was like the bursting of a bombshell in the midst of us. One after another, who had been ardently anxious for this pro-

¹⁴ *The Crisis*, I, 1 (April 14, 1832).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

posal of a community, began to express doubts, or to flatly declare that they could never consent to it; while others declared that the living in a community need not interfere in any way with the marriage question. One poor fellow, Mr. Petrie, an enthusiast in his way, quite agreed with his brother Owen, and made a speech which many blushed to hear, and contended that it would make no difference, as he and his wife were concerned, for she would follow him anywhere. . . . However, nothing could have been better devised than this speech of Mr. Owen to sow the seeds of doubt, and to cause the scheme to be abortive, and when we retired Mr. Thompson expressed himself very strongly against his conduct. I may add that the reporter of our proceedings, Mr. Wm. Carpenter, thought it wise not to embody this discussion in our printed report.¹⁶

Lovett also told of another experience with Owen that throws more light on his character. It appears that Lovett was a member of a committee responsible for issuing a circular inviting members of Parliament to attend the meeting of the Co-operative Congress. Owen did not think the circular adequate in expressing his views; so he added an amendment to it although the amendment had been rejected by the committee. In this form the circular was printed, much to the indignation of Lovett and his colleagues.

A deputation of the committee, including Lovett, called upon Owen and asked for an explanation. Instead of meeting their question, Owen declared that he had something very important to communicate to them; whereupon he began reading the proof from the first issue of the *Crisis*. After some time, while the wrath of the deputation was rising, Lovett stopped him and asked what had that to do with the business at hand. He further called attention to the autocratic nature of his conduct on the amendment. "With the greatest composure," wrote Lovett, "he answered that it evidently was despotic; but as we, as well as the committee that sent us, were all ignorant of his plans, and of the objects he had in view, we must consent to be ruled by despots till we had acquired sufficient knowledge to govern ourselves. After such vain-glorious avowal, what could we say but to report—in the phraseology of one of the deputation—that we had been flabbergasted by him?"¹⁷

In those early years of the 'thirties, Owen carried on his propaganda with incredible zeal. Besides the coöperative congresses and

¹⁶ William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett . . .*, I, 49, 51. Also see William Thompson, *Practical Directions for the Establishment of Communities*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

the work on the *Crisis*, he was holding meeting after meeting and lecturing without pause.

Sometime in the fall of 1830, Owen called a meeting in Freemason's Tavern, London, "for the purpose of taking into consideration the present wretched state of the public press of England; and for devising the best means of giving real knowledge to the people." Owen set out to agitate for the removal of the tax on newspapers and pamphlets—a tax that bore heavily upon the sources of information for the people.

During the meeting, Owen gave his opinion of some of the leading newspapers. He characterized *The Times* (London) as the leading newspaper of the civilized world. But it was a commercial establishment run for profit and an enterprise far too valuable to be imperiled "by attacking superstition in its strong holds. . . . It [*The Times*] is of use to the public in preventing some of the grossest acts of oppression from the powerful to the weak, but it cannot afford to advocate fundamental truths of the highest importance to society, when those truths are in opposition to the notions on which the superstition of Europe has been established and is now maintained."¹⁸

It must be remembered that *The Times* had long since refused Owen space to advance his views, unless he paid for it at the usual rates. Then too, it had turned sharply critical of him and his plans. Owen had every reason to believe that great newspaper was not conducted for the purpose of advancing the truth as he saw it.

Owen also had something to say about the *Morning Herald*. He thought that paper, while under the direction of "the late proprietor, Mr. Thwaites, who lately died, was more free from the influence of superstition than any other daily paper. . . . But since the death of Mr. Thwaites it has become a mere party paper, in support of the superstition of the country, without any of the former impartial principles remaining which made it so valuable to the public."¹⁹

Owen went on and struck at the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Post*, and other daily newspapers. But in the end, he declared that in spite of its defects the press was the very best means to give the people useful knowledge. Therefore, in this particular

¹⁸ *Examiner* (London), October 10, 1830, cited in "The Taxes on Knowledge," *Free Enquirer*, 2d series, III, 42-44 (December 4, 1830).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

meeting an address was carried praying that the King remove the fetters that bound the press.²⁰

Joseph Hume, radical member of Parliament, wrote a letter to Owen shortly after the meeting at Freemasons' Tavern and expressed agreement with him on his advocacy of the removal of the tax on paper, printing newspapers, and cheap publications. But in the same letter he protested Owen's declaration against machinery:

I readily admit that the labour of some has been displaced by machinery, but it is very easy to prove that for one hand that has been drawn out of employment four or more have found employment who otherwise never would have had any.²¹

Hume thought the true cause for the distress was to be found in monopolies, "not forgetting the monopoly of Political power which keeps up the most expensive government on cash and a heavy taxation to support it."²²

In the years since Owen had brought forth his plans for the regeneration of society, the Malthusians had never ceased firing at Owen. And he continued to wince under their attacks. As late as 1835, shortly after the death of Malthus, Owen wrote Henry Brougham pointing to the influence Malthusian ideas appeared to have over the government and Parliament:

The chief obstacle to the formation of national arrangements to educate and employ the people in a superior manner, is the error of the government and legislature relative to the Malthusian doctrine of population. And perhaps a more futile obstacle to the progress of knowledge and happiness has seldom been raised with the same success.²³

In the same letter, Owen worked most zealously to convert Brougham to his way of thinking on Malthus. He argued that Malthus' dictum that population increased faster than food supply might be admitted as an "*abstract truth*, but a truth of no *practical utility*." He went on to emphasize the importance of the vast increase in production of food due to the advances made in chemistry and knowledge of agriculture. Owen insisted that Malthus was ignorant of the practical progress made in the production

²⁰ See *Ibid.*

²¹ October 10, 1830, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Letter in *New Moral World*, I, 271-272 (June 20, 1835).

of food, and his ignorance had been the means of hardening the hearts of the wealthy against reforms for the poor.²⁴

Owen proved a good prophet. Food did not become the great problem to England in the nineteenth century. The prairie lands of North America yielded tremendous crops of wheat, more than enough to feed all the hungry, while England turned into a vast workshop pouring out goods in exchange for the food.

Owen seldom missed an opportunity to attend meetings. He was present at a session of the Working-Men's Association held in Lovett's Coffee House on Gray's Inn Road. The subject of the discussion was "Will Free Trade reduce wages?" Francis Place and Lovett were both present and active in the debate with Owen.

Place made some notes at the time which have been preserved. They are very significant as setting forth the three main cures offered for the distress of the workingman. He wrote them down as he listened to his opponents that Sunday morning and prepared to make his own speech:

(Place.) No wages if no capital; certain number of capitalists; ditto labourers. Increase of labourers; none of capital; wages fall....

(Owen.) We can support all Europe. Lose our time in discussing these subjects. Question, is there knowledge enough among the working people to put an end to all our institutions? Until equality none done. Equality more easy than any other change.

(Lovett.) People would contend for a better state if they had more political power....²⁵

Place, it will be remembered, first met Owen in 1813 when Owen came to London to publish his essays and sought help of that astute tailor. From that time, he watched Owen's career with many shakings of the head; yet he was always friendly to Owen. The two men stood for the same principles, the same ideals: both wanted a better day for the working classes. But they were poles apart in their methods. Place was hardheaded and practical; Owen, vague and almost mystical at times.

In one place in his notes, Place made the following entry relative to Owen:

January, 1836. Mr. Owen this day has assured me, in the presence of more than thirty other persons, that within six months the whole state and condi-

²⁴ See *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Place Collection*, cited by Graham Wallas, *Life of Francis Place*, pp. 360-361.

tion of society in Great Britain will be changed, and all his views will be carried into effect.²⁶

How strange this language must have seemed to Place. Surely, he must have decided that Owen had become a gentle lunatic.

While Owen had been moving up and down the land talking coöperative communities, Francis Place had been weaving snares for the Tory government opposed to the Reform Bill. Owen thought politics and political action as the sum of all futilities; Place, in his turn, looked upon coöperative communities as being outside the pale of common sense.

The coöperative societies, however, grew very rapidly. There were probably four or five hundred societies in existence at the time of the Third Co-operative Congress. But Owen was not content to let this movement take a natural course. He well might have thrown all his energies into the furtherance of coöperative buying and selling and left communism, marriage, and religion to others. But Owen belonged to the cult of "all or nothing." Society must be completely changed at once. Yet he had moments when he descended from his Olympian heights. Such a moment came to him when he played with the idea of labor exchanges.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XVII

LABOR FOR LABOR

AS THE working classes turned toward coöperative buying and selling, they also engaged in a certain amount of coöperative production. Naturally their ventures in this direction were much more precarious than the mere retailing of goods to members. But as organizations of workers banded together for mutual aid found themselves confronted with unemployment, they sought for a way to use their trades at a profit. They made shoes, coats, and furniture and even built houses; and then they opened bazaars to sell their wares to the public or to exchange them for goods they needed.

Early in 1830 the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge opened an exchange bazaar in London. William Lovett in his autobiography tells of the launching of this enterprise and his connection with it.¹ This bazaar did not issue labor notes but sold goods that were sent to it from coöperative societies, where they were manufactured by the unemployed.

In the next few months, many other bazaars were opened, and for a time it looked as if the working people had at length solved their distribution problem. Owen sensed the opportunity of bringing about the millennium speedily and started to work on his own bazaar with the added feature of the "labour notes" as a medium of exchange. But before he was ready, William King, one-time editor of the *Brighton Co-operator*, started a bazaar at Gothic Hall, New Road.² Some idea of this exchange had been given by Robert Dale Owen:

Yesterday we went to visit an establishment recently formed for the purpose of facilitating exchanges of labor among the producing classes, without the intervention of money. It was established at the Gothic Hall, New Road, about six weeks ago, is on a very simple principle; and, as I was much pleased with it and think it well worthy of imitation and likely to succeed in a business point of view, I will give you a sketch of what I learned from Mr. King, the person who, with his daughter, conducts it.

They consider themselves necessitated, for the present, to value articles sent into them nearly according to their monied value in the market.

¹ See *Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, I, 43-44.

² See *Ibid.*, 47.

The course pursued is this. When any article is first deposited in the bazaar, the depositor is requested to mark on it his estimate of its monied value. There is a managing committee of tradesmen, who meet two or three times a week, and to whom, at their first meeting, the articles so deposited and valued are submitted. If they think them useful and saleable and not too highly valued, labor notes to the amount are issued. As an average, five shillings (about a dollar and a quarter) is assumed as the value of a day's labor of ten hours; being sixpence an hour. The labor notes are drawn in accordance with this general standard, thus: Five. Equal to two shillings and sixpence.

This entitles the bearer to any articles to be found in the Bazaar, to the value two and sixpence. The five, for the present, rather points to a principle hereafter to be carried out, according to which all articles should be valued by the hours of labor necessary to produce them (not by dollars and cents) than to the *present* practice of the bazaar: for articles are *not yet* valued there on the principle of labor for equal labor. The reason is obvious. If they were, all whose labor was estimated the lowest would flock thither, and all whose labor was valued at all above the lowest would keep aloof; except in the case of those who would choose, for the sake of principle, to make a daily recurring pecuniary sacrifice. And alas! how small—how very small a proportion of society are these!³

He wrote of a poor woman who came into the bazaar with ten or twenty dozen toothbrushes, which she had been attempting to peddle through the streets at two shillings a dozen. She was trying to earn a little money for furniture. At the bazaar she was given three shillings a dozen and was paid in labor notes, which she promptly turned in again for some articles of furniture she found in the place.

Robert Dale explained in the letter that the proprietor's share for running the business was five per cent. Three and one-third per cent went to pay rent and taxes, thus making a total of eight and one-third per cent as the cost of conducting the enterprise.

The proprietor, King, took pains to give Robert Owen credit for the idea and testified to his devotion by having a portrait of Owen hung up in the bazaar where all might behold it.⁴

Robert Dale wrote of labor notes being used in other bazaars but not on a basis of "labor for equal labor." We know that his father had urged the committee in charge of the Greville Street bazaar to follow the labor note idea, but the committee refused.

³ Robert Dale Owen, "Letters from the Transatlantic," *Free Enquirer*, 2d series, IV, 365-366 (September 8, 1832).

⁴ See *Ibid.*

It did, however, issue exchangeable receipts against the goods deposited; these men too saw the difficulties in fixing a fair average value for an hour's labor of different workmen possessed of varied degrees of skill.⁵

Meantime, Owen hurried forward his plans for opening his own labor exchange. Already he had the background of Josiah Warren's Time Store in Cincinnati, and he was also driven on by the general agitation for currency reform. Ever since the government had resumed specie payments by the act of 1819, the currency tinkers had been busy. Owen joined a great crowd who condemned the government's policy. Not only did he do this, but he advanced some ideas of a revolutionary nature.

At this point it might be well to glance briefly at some of Owen's economic theories, especially those relating to money and the place of labor in the economic order. These theories, it will be recalled, were clearly laid down in his "Report to the County of Lanark" in 1820. In this work Owen argued that the use of gold and silver as money was bad. The only sound and fair measure of value to him was human labor, because human labor properly directed was the source of all wealth.⁶

The cause of the distress which the country was suffering from, according to Owen, was due to the inability of the masses to buy the goods they could produce with such profusion. The remedy was to "let prosperity loose on the country" by substituting labor notes for the currency then in use.⁷ Owen proposed that average human labor be the unit of value. He meant by average neither the labor of the fastest nor the slowest but of the median worker. He thought human labor might be measured in much the same way as horsepower is the unit used to measure mechanical energy.

In attacking gold and silver as artificial mediums of exchange, he did not see that they were real values in themselves and not merely elements that men had arbitrarily fixed upon as money. Neither did Owen explain how the factors other than labor in producing a given article were to be compensated. Interest, on the capital invested in making goods, and management seemed to

⁵ See the *British Co-operator*, n.d., cited by Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen*, II, 404.

⁶ See Robert Owen, "Report to the County of Lanark . . .," *Life*, by Robert Owen, I, 263-310 (Appendix S).

⁷ See *Ibid.*

have been ignored. No doubt Owen was thinking of individual workmen making utilities in their own shops with their own hands and not goods produced in factories with large capital invested and a considerable staff of managers. He certainly did not see the difficulty of separating the reward going to the laborer from the other factors in production if his scheme were to be adopted. In justice to Owen it must be said that he did not insist, as did some who subscribed to the theory that labor produced all wealth, that the worker should receive the full product of labor; but he should receive an average of sixpence an hour. And Owen hit upon this as the unit in his labor exchange. All articles were to be valued in terms of labor hours.

But it must not be assumed that Owen valued all labor at the same price. He recognized that workmen had varied degrees of skill and should be rewarded accordingly. When an article was brought into the exchange, the appraisers placed upon it a price expressed in pounds, shillings, and pence. It would naturally be the market price as nearly as they could determine. The next step was to divide the price thus fixed by sixpence—that being the time-standard rate an hour. If the article were valued at thirty shillings, the workman would receive a labor note stamped "Five Hours."

Owen's plans for a labor exchange were given an unusual impetus by the offer of some buildings on Gray's Inn Road by a disciple, William Bromley. The premises were unusually well adapted for the showing of goods, but the business arrangements made between Owen and Bromley were vague beyond belief. The amount to be paid as rent was apparently not fixed, but provisions were made for buying the premises by 1832 or renting them at a reasonable figure. Owen must have thought that Bromley should donate the place or make the rent very nominal. In any case, trouble arose between the two men, leading to disastrous consequences for the exchange.

On the eve of opening this new experiment of Owen's, his son, Robert Dale, wrote from London:

My father's Bazaar at the large establishment I have already described to you in Gray's Inn Road, is to be opened next Monday; and very great expectations are formed of the results to be obtained. My father—you know his sanguine temper—predicts as its immediate and necessary consequence, a complete revolution in the monied system, and ultimately in the social as

well as commercial institutions of this country. I think the working classes may be essentially benefitted by it, if it be properly conducted; and that is enough to render it deserving of the best wishes and most active exertions of every friend of humanity.⁸

On Monday, September 17, 1832, the National Equitable Labour Exchange opened with great enthusiasm. Tailors marched in with stacks of coats, some fits but many misfits; shoemakers clattered in bearing stiff new boots on their backs; cabinetmakers carted up to the exchange many chests of drawers smelling of new coats of varnish; weavers staggered up to the tables with bolts of serges and worsteds. All clamored for the bright new labor notes. So great was the press of depositors that the governors found it necessary to close down on Thursday for the rest of the week.

In the next few weeks the exchange did an enormous business. In the midst of the enthusiasm and excitement over what seemed the certain success of the enterprise, a great meeting was held at the Institution. The *Crisis* reported a huge crowd packed in the auditorium with "the heat very oppressive. . . ." The meeting had been called to consider "the increasingly distressed state of the nonproductive industrious classes, and to devise efficient means for their permanent relief." At least this was the announced purpose; but the assembly took on the character of a victory celebration.

As might be expected, Owen spoke. He announced to his excited hearers that a new system of business had been born. The labor exchanges were to carry everything before them, and the shopkeepers were to be left without means of support. Something must be done to make them real producers of wealth. Indeed, the "Equitable Labour Exchanges, were the bridge over which society would safely pass out of its present condition, to another and a better."⁹

Owen wound up his speech of jubilation with a declaration that no government in the world could stop the progress of labor exchanges. And then with an oratorical flourish that called out prolonged cheers, he added: "Government must come to us."¹⁰

Owen's bazaar on Gray's Inn Road went on through the fall of

⁸ Robert Dale Owen, "Letters from the Transatlantic," *Free Enquirer*, 2d series, V, 17-18 (November 10, 1832).

⁹ "Public Meeting at the Institution of the Industrious Classes, Gray's-Inn-Road," *The Crisis*, I, 119 (September 29, 1832).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

1832 doing such a business as to silence all doubters. The *Crisis* reported 445,501 labor hours as being deposited and 376,166 hours exchanged in the period from September 3 to December 29, 1832.¹¹

Owen was a very busy man making speeches, writing, and organizing. His son, who was with him at this time, wrote on October 21, 1832:

My father had urged me, in the strongest terms, to remain during the winter in London. I saw that he had so much business on his hands that it was impossible even for his activity to get through it. He frequently rose at four o'clock, and remained at his institution until ten at night. The business there continually increased, and the usual *daily* amount of exchanges was between \$500 and \$700. The lecture rooms were crowded to overflowing. In a word, the harvest was great and the laborers were few.¹²

In the next few months, labor exchanges swept the country. Owen's exchange was merely one of many. A great meeting was held in Beardsworth's Repository outside of London. It was one of those meetings so frequent in the years when Owen's propaganda was operating at full blast. According to the *Crisis*, ten thousand people were assembled. Owen on this occasion made a speech that had the aroma of demagoguery. After calling upon the working classes to sink their differences and join in making the exchanges a success, he had something to say about the privileged class:

He [Owen] now called upon the wealthy classes to come forward and assist in extricating the producers of their wealth from the unremitted poverty by which they were surrounded. If they would do this, their present incomes would be secured to them for the remainder of their lives, and not a particle of their existing wealth would be touched. But if they were determined, selfishly and ignorantly to hold back, then he would say, let them look to themselves (great applause). If they were determined to oppose the righteous cause of the industrious classes, then let them work for themselves; let them see what they could do with their land and capital to save themselves from starvation (vehement cheering.) Let the producers of wealth, therefore, be calm, but firm, for their cause would be sure to triumph. Let them be as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves (cheers).

Then Owen held up a labor note, exclaiming: "This is the new money which we propose to make; it is peculiarly the money of the industrious classes."¹³

¹¹ See the *Crisis*, II, 7 (January 12, 1833).

¹² Robert Dale Owen, *loc. cit.*, pp. 57-58 (December 15, 1832).

¹³ The *Crisis*, I, 157 (December 8, 1832).

But disaster was just around the corner. Bromley, the owner of Owen's premises, had long been dissatisfied with the way Owen was treating him. When he saw the bazaar doing such a fine business, he felt that he too should share in the prosperity, especially when he found himself in need of money.

It appears that the Institution had paid Bromley £160 ground rent for the premises, and Owen had given him £700 for the fixtures. But Bromley demanded that the rent be fixed at £1,400 for the buildings and £320 for the ground effective from January 1, 1833. Owen thought his figures too high. There was much letter writing on Bromley's part, but in the end Owen decided to move.

The break with Bromley came after a year of trouble between Bromley and Owen. In June of 1832, Bromley wrote a letter to Owen bitterly reproaching him for having suggested that he had tampered with Owen's appraiser.¹⁴ It is evident that a "Mr. Fox," Owen's appraiser, had fixed the price of the premises too high to please Owen, and he had accused Bromley of influencing Fox. After Owen and the Institution had quit the place, Bromley wrote a letter to William Pare, one of Owen's disciples, saying Owen had been unjust and dishonest and that he had finally been compelled to turn out "Mr. Owen and his worthless scamps."¹⁵

The quarrel and the necessity of a sudden move to new quarters was a hard blow for the exchange. The inventory taken sometime after the transfer showed a great loss of goods, probably by theft, and the business now took on a less healthy tone.

By 1834 the exchanges in England were fast fading out of the picture. Owen's bazaar, after suffering two removals and many changes of management, was in serious distress. S. Austin, onetime secretary of the bazaar and Owen's right-hand man, wrote to Owen on June 7, 1834, that the exchange was £500 in debt and that it would be well to wind up the whole concern as soon as possible.¹⁶

There is little else to record on the labor exchanges, except to attempt an explanation of their failure. Lovett, who was connected with Owen's bazaar, wrote in his *Life* that the notes began to depreciate and "useful articles soon ceased to be deposited." He also

¹⁴ See letter of William Bromley to Robert Owen, June 13, 1832, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

¹⁵ See letter of William Bromley to William Pare, July 3, 1833, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

¹⁶ In *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

attributed their failure to religious differences, the disinclination of wives to buy at a place where the selection of goods was small and the adventure of shopping absent, and then too the officers of the exchange were not legally responsible for any dishonest practices they might use against the members of the exchange.¹⁷

These causes for failure advanced by Lovett are important but do not seem fundamental. In a more general sense, the exchanges failed because they represented a too decided break with accustomed ways of carrying on the economic life. The coöperative movement, in so far as it meant throwing over the profit system, failed; but when it developed into a dividend-paying joint-stock enterprise with all the characteristics of the growing tendency in business organization, it moved to ever fresh triumphs.

While experiments in coöperation and labor exchanges were being pushed, Owen glimpsed a new opportunity to advance his cause on a larger scale. The working class, disillusioned by the results of the Reform Bill and rendered more desperate by the continued economic distress, turned to trade-unions for relief. Owen now sought to direct these trade-unions toward his way of life.

¹⁷ See William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett . . .*, I, 44.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GRAND NATIONAL

WHILE ORBISTON sank out of sight and the labor exchanges passed into bankruptcy, the working classes organized and marched. They marched and shouted with the middle class for the passage of the Reform Bill.

William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, Watson, and many others of their leaders had once sat at the feet of Owen. Time, however, shook their faith in his city of the parallelograms; but from a thousand rostrums they voiced his criticism of capitalistic society. They proclaimed his message of a new day for the workers when self-help and education would make them free. In those years of agitation no resolution was passed and no set of principles was adopted that did not bear the marks of his teaching.

In London, in Manchester, in Birmingham, and in the cities of the north, political unions and trade-unions were formed. Indeed, it was a time when working-class activities were at high tide. Owen marked this fervor for organization and sought to bend it to his own ends. It is true that he had no interest in parliamentary reform, but he might use the trade-unions to realize his dreams of an England of communities.

While he was pouring forth his gospel of coöperation at his Gray's Inn Institution, James Bronterre O'Brien of Chartist fame wrote Owen a letter begging him to model the Gray's Inn Institution after the Birmingham Political Union. But at the same time he confessed his conviction that the working class would find the Reform Bill a delusion. "If I mistake not," he added, "your ideas and my own are the same, or nearly so."¹

The Birmingham Political Union was organized by Thomas Attwood in a great meeting on January 25, 1830, when 20,000 persons assembled to hear him explain how the middle class and the working class were to combine for parliamentary reform. This organization came to be the model for similar combinations in every large city in the kingdom.

One of the most conspicuous of the working-class organizations was the London National Union of the Working Classes. It was

¹ May 27, 1832, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

founded in 1831 and became the organization out of which sprang Chartism. The National Union grew out of the British Union for the Diffusion of Co-operative Knowledge. Its leaders were William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, James Watson, and a man by the name of Cleave, all imbued with Owenite principles plus a desire for political action. The Union met at a place in London called the Rotunda, near the Blackfriars Bridge, and possessed a militant paper entitled the *Poor Man's Guardian* published by Hetherington in defiance of the government tax.

Months of agitation followed; the Tories, fearful of revolution, gave way, and the Reform Bill, so long prayed for, passed into law. The working classes soon found they had been duped. The people of property belonging to the newly enfranchised middle class had no mind to let the proletariat into the sanctuary of lawmaking. And so the working classes turned to trade-unions and Chartism for a way to gain their ends.

Owen now stepped forward to lead those who saw the futility of political action. But when some among the leaders of labor, especially William Benbow, proposed a general strike to enforce their demands for political representation, Owen balked. He never at any time counseled any but peaceful means for the attainment of his ends.

The feeling of resentment against the middle class was intensified by the New Poor Law enacted in 1832—a law which made poverty something akin to a crime and plainly showed the effects of Malthus and his essay.

Before the passage of the Reform Bill, the operative builders, suffering from low wages and believing themselves the victims of middlemen, turned to coöperation. They held a congress in Manchester during the last week of September, 1831, and adopted a plan for labor exchanges and coöperative societies.² They were led by James Morrison and James E. Smith. Morrison became editor of the *Pioneer*, a weekly journal devoted to the cause of the builders. His philosophy was distinctly syndicalistic and savored strongly of the "class war." Smith followed him closely.

The next step in the growing organization of labor was the congress of October, 1833, in London, when delegates of coöperative societies and labor unions met. On the evening before the congress

² See the *Crisis*, III, 44 (October 12, 1833).

assembled, on October 6, 1833, Owen addressed a mass meeting held at Charlotte Street:

I now give you a short outline of the great changes which are in contemplation and which shall come suddenly upon Society, like a thief in the night. . . . We have long since discovered that as long as Master contends with Master no improvement, either for man or master, will be possible: there is no other alternative, therefore, but national companies for every trade . . . All trades shall first form associations or parochial lodges to consist of a convenient number for carrying on the business.³

Here Owen was sketching a scheme for a mighty network of co-operatives with a Grand National Council at the top. But he was moving far too fast for his time, as he was soon to find out.

The congress met and deliberated behind closed doors. Just what happened can only be conjectured from later events. Probably the delegates agreed to go home and organize the workers into unions with the aim of acting independently of the employing class. They were, no doubt, following the main trend of Owen's philosophy of coöperation in production and distribution. In any case, during the next few months unions sprang up by magic, while the propertied classes in desperation turned to the government for help.

As the union membership mounted to a figure not far from one million, the spirit of class conflict took possession of the workers everywhere in Britain. Their orators now used such terms as the class war, strikes, proletariat, bourgeoisie, and solidarity—all the words in the vocabulary of modern labor leaders.

Owen grew alarmed. Class warfare had no place in his scheme of redemption. In the pages of the *Crisis*, he proclaimed that capital was also a producer and deserved friendly nods from the workers.⁴ He further sought to head off the movement toward syndicalism by founding a new society, the National Regeneration Society, devoted to securing the eight-hour day by March 1, 1834. This great innovation was to be gained by the joint action of employers and employees. The more radical trade-unionists talked about the general strike as means of attaining the same end.

In dragging this society upon the already crowded stage of labor organization, Owen sought the assistance of Richard Oastler, who was one of a little group struggling to put a ten-hour law upon the

³ *Ibid.*, III, 42-43 (October 12, 1833).

⁴ December 7, 1833, and January 11, 1834.

statute book. Oastler was not minded to abandon his measure for an eight-hour bill, especially when the people supporting him expected him to carry on. In a letter to Owen he made it clear that he would not lend his support to the Regeneration Society and its eight-hour platform unless there was public pressure to justify him. He declared, however, that he would not argue against eight hours.⁵

Opposition to Owen's eight-hour day came from the workers themselves. A committee of the Sheffield Branch of the Regeneration Society addressed a memorial to Owen protesting that his advocacy of the corn laws⁶ and the eight-hour day would mean the loss of markets to their rivals in trade who were not bread taxed and who worked longer hours. The opening lines of the memorial are interesting because they show how much Owen won the love of people even though they disagreed with him:

Kind And Dear Sir:

You came among us—a rich man among the poor—and did not call us rabble. This was a phenomenon new to us. There was no sneer on your lips, no covert scorn in the tone of your voice; you met us as a fortunate brother ought to meet his affectionate but suffering brethern.⁷

The memorial was signed by five members of the committee: Ebenezer Elliot, Joseph Oddy Hustler, James Somerset, Thomas Sheldon, and Thomas James Codwallader.

The Times in an editorial in its issue of January 28, 1834, took a rap at Owen for some of his economic views and praised the five men of Sheffield. This drew Owen's fire, and he wrote a protesting letter to the paper complaining that he was being abused. *The Times* replied at once:

We publish a letter from Mr. Owen. We are sorry he is losing his temper because he cannot persuade us to adopt his opinions. He says that we abuse him; we deny it. We have never spoken of him except in terms of kindness. We think him a very benevolent but a very wrong-headed man. What does he mean

⁵ November 22, 1833, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

⁶ Strangely enough, while Owen appeared to have been opposed to the repeal of the corn laws, yet we find in his letter to C. Babbage, written approximately at the same time as the Sheffield memorial, a request that Babbage join him in an anti-corn-law association. It is possible, however, that this association was meant to be an anti-corn-law *repeal* association. Owen's letter to Babbage was written January 23, 1834, and is in the *Correspondence of C. Babbage*, MSS.

⁷ *The Times* (London), January 24, 1834.

by his talk of resorting to some other means of vindicating himself less pleasant to us than his letters? Does he think his letters pleasant?^s

While the year 1833 had been a year of triumph for Owen, it had also brought its penalties. As he grew more and more prominent, he drew down upon himself increased opposition. And being of flesh and blood, he grew arrogant and dictatorial at times. The gentle Mr. Owen became the high and mighty one who treated those opposed to him as ignorant children.

As Owen looked around, he saw Morrison and Smith as the head and front of the party advocating direct action. With a swiftness and directness not characteristic of him, he brought enough pressure to bear to secure the dismissal of Morrison from the *Pioneer* and Smith from the *Crisis*. In his persistent desire for legal and peaceful methods, Owen was supported by James Bronterre O'Brien. But the two were far apart. O'Brien wanted the workers to gain political power by agitating for universal suffrage, while Owen insisted upon coöperative self-governing communities.

The swelling act in the drama of working-class protest came in 1834 with the rise of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. The platform adopted by the organization shows in no uncertain way the influence of Owen. In case of strikes or turnouts, the members were to be employed on land bought by the unions. Thus they could make themselves self-supporting. Workshops were also to be provided where the men unemployed could be put at productive labor. It was recommended that each lodge establish depots for provisions and articles in general domestic use in order to provide commodities at a little above wholesale prices.^o

But it was all very futile—this grand attempt at organizing labor on a national scale. Lockouts and strikes exhausted the treasury of the unions. Then too, officers of the Grand National embezzled the funds of the union. The funds of trade-unions were not protected by law. To make the position of the union still more hazardous, Owen, Morrison, and Smith were no longer able to work together. Though Owen managed to throw them out of the labor movement, the lack of harmony within and the all too numerous enemies from without brought the organization to the verge of dissolution by the summer of 1834.

^s January 29, 1834.

^o See Max Beer, *History of British Socialism*, I 342.

The collapse of the Grand National was hastened by the swift and cruel blow struck by the government earlier in the year. The government rolled down upon the unions with the conviction of six Dorchester laborers for swearing and administering oaths contrary to law. They were members of a lodge of the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers, a union affiliated with Grand National. They were duly tried, found guilty, and sentenced to transportation for seven years—a sentence entirely out of line with British traditions. But the governing class in England was frightened, and it behaved accordingly.

Owen was thoroughly aroused and marched off at once to see Melbourne, the Home Secretary, but without result. Then Owen and the trade-unionists organized a monster protest movement that was to take the form of a procession bearing a petition to the Home Secretary's office. Melbourne heard of this and wrote at once to Owen warning him of the dangers of bloodshed in such a move.¹⁰ Lord Melbourne throughout his public career was inclined to be friendly and tolerant toward Owen, but he was firm at this time in his resolve not to receive any petition if presented by a great body of men and told Owen as much in an interview before the procession marched.

A day or two before the mass protest was held, Owen received a letter from one of his supporters warning him against marching. "They will crucify you," he wrote. But neither this warning nor Melbourne's deterred Owen. He marched on the appointed day, April 21, 1834, at the head of 30,000 men. The government, thoroughly frightened, ordered out several regiments of troops; but there was no violence. Melbourne kept his word, however, and refused to receive the petition at this time. Later he did receive it but under his own terms and without taking any action.

Months later Owen was still persisting in his efforts to secure a pardon for the six convicted men. When Goulburn, then Home Secretary, refused to ask the King to pardon them, Owen, through the Association of the Working Class and Others, sent a memorial to William IV. The memorial contained some very significant passages. It pointed out that the existing system of government could be supported only by encouraging associations for mutual aid among the producers of wealth. And it stated that the nonpro-

¹⁰ April 2, 1834, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

ducers of wealth were losing their power, while producers were gaining in power. Then finally the memorial declared it an unsound policy for the nonproducers not to remit the sentence after they had shown their power.¹¹

In the meantime, Owen determined to put the trade-union movement on a plane more in keeping with his ideas. It was at this stage that he terminated the existence of the *Crisis* in August of 1834 and founded in its place the *New Moral World*.¹² And at the same time he called another meeting of delegates of the Grand National. Owen told them that they must change their tactics. Opposition from the government and employers made it imperative they take a milder line and also that they take a new name: The British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity, and Knowledge. With such a name and a policy of conciliation, they announced to the propertied classes the passing of militant unionism.¹³

In the last number of the *Crisis*, Owen, referring to the meeting, broke out into language prophetic and even mystical:

The great crisis of human nature will be this week passed. The system under which man has hitherto lived dies a natural death and another assumes its place. The accursed system of the old world of ignorance, of poverty, of oppression, of fear, of crime, and of misery, this week, this memorable week in the annals of man's history, dies forever. The delegates of the British and Foreign Association of Industry and Knowledge, called especially from all parts of the kingdom to their great council, held, during the last sixteen days in the metropolis of the most civilized nation of the earth, to consider in what manner the awful Crisis in which industry and knowledge were involved, should terminate, have, by their wisdom and firmness, now declared unanimously to all people, that the change from this Pandemonium of wickedness and lies shall not be by violence or by fraud, nor yet by any of the acts or weapons of the expiring old world; but that it shall be through a great moral revolution of the human mind, directed solely by truth, by charity, and by kindness.¹⁴

On the passing of the *Crisis*, he became still more prophetic:

Men of all nations and colours, rejoice with us in this *great event*, for certain deliverance, from all human wickedness and folly is near at hand! Regret not

¹¹ See copy of the "Memorial to William IV by The Association of Working Classes and Others," June 23, 1835, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

¹² See the *Crisis*, IV, 154 (August 23, 1834).

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 153 (August 23, 1834).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154 (August 23, 1834).

that this *Crisis* now expires, for it dies at its appointed period, to be succeeded by the New Moral World, in which truth, industry, and knowledge will for ever reign triumphant. For truth is alone Virtue and Religion.¹⁵

Owen's messiahship had by this time taken on a definitely mystical tone. Henceforth his work was to be almost entirely ethical. No more was he to concern himself with such mechanisms as trade-unions and labor exchanges.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XIX

THE MARRIAGES OF THE PRIESTHOOD

THE MOVING events of the years when Owen was in the thick of the trade-unionist struggle were not to his liking. He made but a feeble figure as a leader of a militant movement, for his heart was not in it. Only because he hoped to convert the mass of labor to his way of life did he descend at all into the turmoil of labor politics. Therefore, when the Grand National broke down under the attacks of the public and the government, Owen gathered a few disciples about him and retired from the scene.

Owen now busied himself writing the first chapters of his social bible, the *Book of the New Moral World*. He also entered into a season of journeyings through the length and breadth of Britain with an occasional trip to the Continent and the United States. He witnessed the steady growth of coöperation, but it was not the coöperation he had preached, where buying and selling were to be no more. It was rather retailing carried on by consumers' societies for the purpose of furnishing members with household goods at a reduced price.

He watched the rising tide of Chartism with utter disapproval:

When the people really awake to a consideration of their situation, they will see that empty talk is a feeble weapon, when employed against the strong phalanx of property, political, moral, and social influence; and that, in order to conquer, they must bring into the field analagous forces. Our principles alone supply these—universal suffrage will never give us communities; communities alone can give us universal suffrage; they must precede, not follow its attainment.¹

But many of his onetime followers thought otherwise. Lovett, Hetherington, Watson, and Bronterre O'Brien now threw themselves into the Chartist agitation and thereby forsook the gentle way. "Owenism," or socialism, lived on but not as a movement of the masses. It came to have the character of a religion with Owen as the master and a band of disciples to go out into cities and towns to bring in the converts.

In all of Owen's activities with coöperatives, labor exchanges, and trade-unions, it may appear that he had been blown around

¹ "Is Universal Suffrage Necessary to the Establishment or Perpetuity of Communities?" *New Moral World*, IV, 329-330 (August 11, 1838).

by the winds of circumstance. But in reality, he probably looked upon all of these schemes as mere vehicles to bring him to the high-road of his ultimate ideal. The best illustration of this is given in his speech to the Friends of Truth in Paisley, when he laid down his whole ethical philosophy in a way which makes clear that all he had undertaken by way of reforms were only means to an end. In all probability, however, he did not see that end until sometime after the "Report to the County of Lanark." He told the people of Paisley:

When I reflected—in my early years,—upon the gross ignorance of the whole race of man, which produced the wars, massacres, falsehood, deception, poverty, and all the endless crimes which have hitherto afflicted and brutalised all the nations of the earth, upon the various religions which have divided, and which yet divide man from man over the world, filling the minds of all with errors of the imagination which perplex and confound the rational faculties of all; and when lastly I reflected upon the general spirit of the age, to buy cheap and sell dear, which injurious spirit is now rapidly forwarded among the populations of all countries, and destroying in bud the germs of all the superior feelings of human nature, I at first almost despaired of discovering principles sufficiently powerful to control and overcome the evils which ignorance had thus introduced, and which the overheated and deranged imaginations of men yet maintain in opposition to their highest and best interest. But further observation of human nature, and deeper reflection, forced upon me an overwhelming and most cheering conviction, that man might yet be relieved from his errors, and that it was possible to teach him *truth* for his *good*, instead of *error* for his *misery*.

Being enabled, not certainly by any power of my creating, to make this discovery, I was forced to pursue it, until another system for the government of man became quite familiar to me, a system derived from the laws of nature, and which, when adopted, must insure excellence and happiness to the human race.

This system is derived *solely* from *God*, or that *Power* which *compels* us to have our *thoughts* and our *feelings*; it is in accordance with all nature, and can produce good only, through all the future generations of man. It therefore now defies all the prejudices which ignorance has implanted in man through all the ages which have passed; it now defies all that man can do against it.

I am compelled to know that this system is founded on an immovable rock; that its walls are of adamant, and that the shafts which class, or sect, or party, may hurl against it, will recoil upon the assailants and utterly destroy them.

The infant school, the shortening the hours of labour in manufactories, the poor colonies in Holland, the national system of education in Prussia, the present cordial national union between the British and North American Governments, all of which I have been permitted to be the instrument to effect, are merely preliminary measures put forth preparatory to the great change,

which that Power which governs the universe had evidently destined, shall take place at this period of human affairs; a change which will enable the population of this and of all other countries to emancipate themselves from the physical and mental slavery in which all, from the greatest to the least, are now fast spell-bound in chains of the imagination.

It is, indeed, most gratifying to me to observe the rapid progress which the public mind in all countries is now making towards this new life, this new mode of human existence, in which all shall be essentially benefitted, and in which not one will be injured.²

The great change that was to come "like a thief in the night" could be effected only by education, and education came to mean for Owen teaching men to live together in brotherly love. The community was to be a "beloved community" purged of all self-seeking. The parallelograms so often ridiculed by his critics were not to be mere barracks for housing regimented people, but they were to be communities of opportunity for individuals to live freed from the stupidities of the competitive life.

It will be remembered that Owen had never wavered since he made the memorable pronouncement against private property, religions, and marriage. And now that he was free of labor exchanges and trade-unions, he turned to lay bare the last-named in the trinity of evils.

In the closing months of 1834, the *New Moral World* devoted page after page to Owen's lectures on marriage given at the Institution on Charlotte Street. He exposed the iniquities of the priesthood and lectured on the evils of marriage as it was forced upon unhappy couples by the Church. These lectures seemed to arouse the clergy even more than his earlier attacks upon religions. It is not strange that this was so, because Owen gave the priesthood all the blame for the evils of the marriage system. Nothing could equal the supreme naïveté and boldness with which he approached the problem, but it must be remembered that no problem daunted him. However, the whole position of marriage and divorce in the England of Owen's day left much to be desired.

At the time Owen attacked the institution of marriage in England, the Church of England, except in the cases of Jews and Quakers, held a monopoly of the marriage sacrament. Civil marriages had not yet come to be. Divorce was a recourse open only to

² "The Answer of Robert Owen to the Address of the Friends of Truth in Paisley," *New Moral World*, III, 57-58 (December 17, 1836).

the rich and involved a slow, painful process. Justice Maule, in sentencing a prisoner convicted of marrying again while his wife still lived, used this ironical language :

Prisoner at the bar : You have been convicted of the offense of bigamy, that is to say, of marrying a woman while you had a wife still alive, though it is true she has deserted you and is living in adultery with another man. You have, therefore, committed a crime against the laws of your country, and you have also acted under a very serious misapprehension of the course which you ought to have pursued. You should have gone to the ecclesiastical court and there obtained against your wife a decree *a mensa et thoro*. You should then have brought an action in the courts of common law and recovered, as no doubt you would have recovered, damages against your wife's paramour. Armed with these decrees, you should have approached the legislature and obtained an act of parliament which would have rendered you free and legally competent to marry the person whom you have taken on yourself to marry with no such sanction. It is quite true that these proceedings would have cost you many hundreds of pounds, whereas you probably have not as many pence. But the law knows no distinction between rich and poor. The sentence of the court upon you, therefore, is that you be imprisoned for one day, which period has already been exceeded, as you have been in custody since the commencement of the assizes.³

The difficulty of securing divorce certainly contributed to much unhappiness and immorality in England, and Owen was all too mindful of the fact. But his attack upon marriage went beyond a mere advocacy of easier divorce and secular marriages. It struck at the whole idea of the "single family arrangement" and the permanency of unions. His lectures were full of vast generalizations and sweeping indictments not alone applicable to marriage but to human nature in general. The existing marriage system fostered by the priesthood was shot through with woe and misery. His portrayal of it ran in this vein :

And I now tell you, and through you the population of all the nations of the earth, that the marriages of the world, under the system of moral evil in which they have been devised and are now contracted, are the sole cause of all the prostitution, of all its incalculable grievous evils, and of more than one-half of all the vilest and most degrading crimes known to society. And that, until you put away from among you and your children for ever, *this accursed thing*, you will never be in a condition to speak the truth, to become chaste or virtuous in your thoughts and feelings, or to know what real happiness is. For now almost all who are in the married state are daily and hourly practising the deepest deception, and living in the grossest prostitution of body and mind ;

³ Article on divorce in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 339.

and misery is multiplied by it, beyond any of your feeble powers, in your present irrational state, to estimate; for it extends directly and indirectly through all the ramifications of life. Yes! your fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, and children, are one and all suffering most grievously from this opposition to nature, from this ignorance of your own organization, from this unnatural crime, which destroys the finest feelings and best powers of the species, by changing sincerity, kindness, affection, sympathy, and pure love, into deception, envy, jealousy, hatred, and revenge⁴

In some cases he descended into particulars but always to set forth a principle that he held dear. For instance, Owen preached in wearisome reiteration his psychological creed that man's feelings were beyond the control of his will; therefore, it was idle to suppose that a husband could be expected to love his wife always:

And first, it is most injurious to the husband, who has been trained from infancy, by the priesthood, to believe that he has the power to feel or not to feel at his pleasure. This is the foundation on which the priesthood and governments form his character. With this impression deeply made on his mind, we will suppose him in the ordinary circumstances attending these irrational unions, and that he is about to form a marriage of affection, and of affection, too, on both sides. He supposes, as he has been taught naturally to believe, that the delightful feelings of affection which he entertains for his wife on the day in which they are made, by the priests and the government, to engage to be *one* during their lives, and to love each other until death, will remain, and that he shall have no difficulty in permanently retaining those feelings. Nothing, according to his previous instruction, can be more easy than to love or hate whom he pleases, and for as long or short a time as he pleases. He has been told "that, to be good, he must love his neighbour as himself." He, therefore, naturally concludes there can be no difficulty in loving the selected most favourite object of his choice with the most sincere and ardent affection so long as both may live. The solemn engagement is therefore entered into, and the promise unhesitatingly given by the happy pair, as they are usually denominated by their relatives and neighbours, and the ceremony concludes by the parties discovering, in one short hour, that they are inseparably bound for life.⁵

Owen went on at great length to point out all the difficulties arising in the marriage relation, the most serious being, of course, that after the husband and wife had passed through the valley of disillusionment, they longed to be separated.

⁴ Robert Owen, "Lecture Delivered at Institution, 14, Charlotte Street, Sunday, November 30, 1834," *New Moral World*, I, 41-45 (December 6, 1834).

⁵ Robert Owen, "Lecture Delivered at Institution, 14, Charlotte Street, Sunday Evening, December 14, 1834," *New Moral World*, I, 57-61 (December 20, 1834).

Owen drew a picture of the bored husband seeking relief from his unhappy lot by calling on a female "prepared to receive visitors." Yet all this waywardness was due to ignorance.

If the husband had been taught to know himself and the influence of circumstances upon human nature, he would become conscious that the pleasurable sensations which he experienced in the company of the person visited, and the painful ones inflicted upon him in the company of his wife, arose more frequently from the *difference of the circumstances* in which these parties were placed, than from the *difference of persons*. Were the wife, as she was the first choice of the husband, placed in the position of the visited female, and the latter within the circumstances of the wife, it is most probable that in nineteen cases out of twenty the feelings respecting them would be reversed.⁶

After dilating upon the plight of the husband, Owen never neglected to do justice to the unfortunate position of the wife. She now, according to Owen, "by religion and law" became the property of her husband and of necessity had to fall in with his will no matter how arbitrary. The result must be that the wife would resort to deception. She could not live so unnatural a life.

As nature, however, has never once been consulted in all these proceedings of artifice, ceremony, and absurdity, and all her laws have been neglected or openly opposed, she interposes and insists upon having *her laws obeyed*, and the will, opinions, and feelings of the wife are consequently not the husband's, but nature's, and if he will insist upon that which it is not in the power of his wife to give to any one contrary to nature's laws, he forces her to learn the common hypocrisy of a wife, and to become an adept in hiding from him her will, her opinions, her feelings, and often her conduct. While to the wife this long life of deception becomes the most destructive of every ennobling and superior faculty, feeling, and quality of human nature, and she is necessarily forced to become a weak, cunning, deceptions, inferior being, whatever she may be considered by her husband and the world.⁷

Owen went further and grew bolder. He next declared that "all married pairs, with a very few exceptions, are living in a state of the most degrading prostitution, enforced upon them by the human laws of marriage."⁸ It is probable he meant that marriage was prostitution if carried on without love. But at other times he spoke of the wide prevalence of prostitution as such and charged it to the "artificial marriages" advocated by the clergy.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Lecture Delivered at Burton Rooms, Burton Street, January 11, 1835," *New Moral World*, I, 89-91 (January 17, 1835).

Owen had much to say about chastity:

Pure, genuine, unadulterated chastity will be known only when men and women shall form their unions through the sympathies of unbiassed affection, and when these feelings, given to us by our nature for our happiness, shall be openly and undisguisedly expressed in all the simplicity and innocency of truth, that all might know them, and, knowing them, that none might interfere.

This is the only mode by which the chastity of woman can be insured; for if men are not chaste, how is it possible for women to be so?⁹

When Owen was attacked for threatening the order and stability of society by his views on marriage, he declared that society as constituted was in "utter confusion," and, therefore, it had no order to maintain. Each individual pursuing his selfish ends did not form for him any harmony worth preserving.

When Owen's critics raised a great cry against the danger to children if the bonds of matrimony should be loosened, he called attention to the irrational education children were receiving at the hands of their parents in the "single-family arrangements." Of course, as a cure he had in mind the community life where the children would be the concern of the group and would be educated by it. The failure of New Harmony had in no way shaken his faith in the emancipation of men through education. Indeed, on the occasion of a lecture given on marriage early in 1835, he spoke in no uncertain terms of the duty the national government owed to society.

Children might be so trained as to yield a rich return to society for its investment.

This result, however, cannot be effected by the immediate parents of the children; society alone can insure these blessings to mankind; and the first indication of governments becoming rational will be, when they shall be discovered to be earnestly and sincerely engaged in devising a sound practical national education for the children of all their subjects; an education in which physical and mental employment of real utility and value to mankind, must, of necessity, become an essential part. Whatever may be the intentions of Tories, Whigs, or Radicals, of the religious or the irreligious members of the new House of Commons, if they do not bring forward this subject on the only solid foundation on which it can be placed, that is, to form a superior rational character for each individual, believe not in their wisdom or practical knowledge for legislators. Be assured they are mere talking members, without the requisite qualifications to lay the foundation on which to make useful laws or

⁹ *Ibid.*

regulations for the government of the British empire; and more especially to make them, at this important period, in the emergency of human affairs, when the nations of the earth are looking to the parliament and people of this country for a great and good example, an example, too, which all nations and people might with safety adopt, to insure, in peace, their future progress in all kinds of improvement, physical, mental, and moral, that their progressive prosperity and happiness might be rendered certain, without creating the envy or jealousy of any other portion of the human race¹⁰

Thus Owen called upon his people to form a national policy in education. But years were to pass before they gave heed to that call. Not until the Education Act of 1870 did England launch out on a plan to educate the masses.

In all of Owen's attacks upon the marriage system of his day, he never left off whacking away at "false modesty" and prudery. He insisted over and over again upon frankness in dealing with matters of sex. Children must be taught the facts about their natures. The whole sex life must be healthy and could only be made so by removing from it the veil of mystery and secrecy.

It is not strange that Englishmen of the age that was to make prudery a religion should have taken alarm at such a prophet as Owen. Indeed, we are told that his books and lectures were considered too vile to be carried by respectable booksellers in London.

Owen blamed the clergy for the rise of false modesty:

The fall of man from innocence and from the plain and direct road to intelligence and happiness occurred when the priesthood of the world induced some of our ignorant ancestors to feel ashamed of any part of their nature. That this feeling is altogether an artificial and false shame may be ascertained by observing how difficult it is to impress the necessity for it upon all children, and to notice the different habits respecting it which obtain among various nations and tribes, and how much the people of one country condemn the notions of others upon the practices which, in these respects, are national in various districts of the world.¹¹

And so in this easy manner Owen disposed of the origin of shame. The priesthood was to blame, as it was to blame for irrational marriage and most of the other troubles that flesh is heir to. Verily, Owen belonged to the generation of Rousseau.

While Owen railed ceaselessly at the "false modesty" inspired

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ "Lecture Delivered at Charlotte Street Institution, Sunday Evening, January 4, 1835," *New Moral World*, I, 81-83 (January 10, 1835).

by the priesthood through its "satanic device" of marriage, he dealt direct and heavy blows at celibacy:

*Celibacy, beyond the period plainly indicated for its termination by nature, although esteemed a high virtue under the reign of moral evil, will be known, under the reign of moral good, to be a great crime, necessarily leading to disease of body and mind, and to unnatural thoughts, feelings, and conduct, and to every kind of falsification of our real impressions, sympathies, and sensations, all of which are of nature's most wise creation, in perfect accordance with the superior organization which it has given to man over the inferior animals.*¹²

At this point Owen spoke the language of the modern psychologists, especially those belonging to the school of Sigmund Freud. In all his views on sex and marriage, Owen showed himself to be healthy-minded and frank.

Though Owen spoke brave and revolutionary words against marriage and conventional sex morality, his practice did not always square with his theories. At New Harmony marriage and giving in marriage went on in the same old way, though there were cases where an attempt was made to eliminate the clergy in the ceremony.

In an address given at Charlotte Street in 1833, Owen set forth his regulations for marriage:

MARRIAGE

Persons having an affection for each other, and being desirous of forming an union, first announce such intention publicly in our Sunday assemblies. If the intention remain at the end of *three months*, they make a second public declaration; which declaration [on] being registered in the books of the Society will constitute their marriage:—

Object of Marriage

In our new world, marriages will be solely formed to promote the happiness of the sexes, and if this end be not obtained, the object of the union is defeated:—

DIVORCE

1st. *When BOTH parties desire to separate.*

Should the parties, therefore, after the termination of *twelve months at the soonest*, discover that their dispositions and habits are unsuited to each other, and that there is little or no prospect of happiness being derived from their union, they are to make a public declaration as before, to that effect. After which they return, and live together *six months longer*—at the termination of

¹² "Lecture Delivered at Charlotte Street Institution, London, Sunday Evening, November 30, 1834," *New Moral World*, I, 41-45 (December 6, 1834).

which, if they still find their qualities discordant, and *both* parties unite in the declaration, they make a second declaration; both of which being duly registered and witnessed, will constitute their legal separation.—

2nd. *When ONLY ONE party deserves a separation.*

Should *one alone* come forward upon the last declaration, and the other object to the separation, they would be required to live together another *six months*, to try if their feelings and habits could be made to accord, so as to promote happiness. But if at the end of the second six months, the objecting party shall remain of the same mind, the separation is then to be final:

Position of parties after separation.

And the parties may, without diminution of public opinion, form new unions more suited to their dispositions.¹³

Since this scheme of marriage and divorce was to be in effect in Owen's ideal society, the children of separated parents would be taken care of by the community.

There were many in England who professed to see in Owen's marriage ideas an endorsement of free love. Indeed, he spoke quite freely of making nature the guide to mating, and he dwelt at length upon the "superior children" that would be born to couples naturally joined. In his denunciations of unions maintained by compulsion, he gave no recognition to the spirit of forbearance. Of course he assumed all marriages in the old moral world to be bad; they were bad chiefly because of the taint of priestcraft.

It was not strange, then, that Owen should have drawn the fire of the clergy he so plainly berated.

A certain clergyman bearing the name of Brindley moved to the defense of marriage. His methods were not those of sweet reasonableness but were rather those of the bully and cheap platform orator. He made no attempt to meet Owen's arguments but appealed to the emotions of his audiences. He not only spoke against Owen and the socialists, but he issued pamphlets. The following is an example of his style of attack:

Yet Robert Owen has most perversely declared that "Marriage is the chief cause of all the vice and misery that exists in the world," and that there is more prostitution among married persons than with open prostitutes! Let every honest man and woman throw back the charge with indignation. When Mr. Owen and his missionaries come into your neighbourhood, tell them that whatever wickedness he may have been accustomed to encourage in his

¹³ "Proposed Regulations of Marriage and Divorce under the Rational System of Society," *Manifesto of Robert Owen, the Discoverer, Founder, and Promulgator, of the Rational System of Society, and of the Rational Religion*, pp. 56-58.

'Social Communities,' the mechanics and agricultural labourers of England are virtuous and religious as well as industrious and honest. There are some vicious individuals, we know, in every society, and ever will be, because of man's evil nature, but let it not go forth to the world that the state of the married people of England is a state of gross prostitution. Do not allow yourselves to be so shamefully slandered by a man who wishes to excuse the immoralities and wickedness of his own system, by boldly charging these vices upon mankind in general. Is it not to such persons that the following passages apply? "Being filled with all unrighteousness, *fornication*, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, backbiters, *haters of God*, spiteful, proud, boasters, INVENTORS OF EVIL THINGS, *disobedient to parents*, without understanding, covenant breakers, *without natural affection*." (Rom. i, 29, 31.) "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. *There is no fear of God before their eyes*." (Rom. iii, 13, 14, 18.)"¹⁴

Thus he bombarded Owen with Holy Writ, representing him and his socialists as altogether vile creatures to be shunned by virtuous Englishmen. He professed to see in Owen a menace to the home and family. The children must not become "PUBLIC PROPERTY."¹⁵

Brindley and others circulated stories of socialists seducing innocent girls and deserting them. Their meeting places were portrayed as brothels, while insinuations of immorality were made against Owen himself and not without foundation against George Fleming, former editor of the *New Moral World* and social missionary. Pamphlets were published laying bare the awful iniquities of the free-love Owenites. Their titles were highly suggestive. For instance some read like these: *A True Exposure of the Noted Robert Owen, The Immoralities of Socialism, An Exposure of a New System of Irreligion which is called the New Moral World, and The Human Eccoleobion; or the New Moral Warren*.

This last named work was a satire and burlesque on Owen's *New Moral World* done in doggerel verse. The excerpts given below are a sample of the work of some anonymous writer:

I built a large square,
And in it placed there
Of the sexes about the same number:
I enacted no laws
For Chastity's cause,

¹⁴ John Brindley, *Reply to Robert Owen's Attack upon Marriage: In an Address to the Working Classes*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

As children could ne'er us encumber ;
 For, when babies are born,
 From infancy's morn
 They're reared in New Harmony's laws,
 In our epicene schools,
 Where they follow Love's rules
 And cannot commit any "faux pas."
 Doating mothers, I find,
 Are often inclined
 Their children to spoil thro' indulgence :
 I stand nurses select,
 All the faults to correct
 Which tarnish their mental effulgency.
 As soon as short-coated,
 Their time is devoted
 To gambols, their strength to improve :
 Adolescence advancing,
 They learn ploughing and dancing,
 Scrubbing floors, the piano, and love.

* * * * *

Chastity is a connexion
 United with affection—
 Here there can be no pollution :
 But if love should forsake us,
 And coldness overtake us,
 Then marriage is mere prostitution.

Another pamphlet apparently written by E. Hancock gives an account of the seduction of three girls by socialists. The title is sufficiently explanatory: *Oh Vice where is thy Shame. The Horrible effects of the Social System with an account of the cruel seduction of the Three Unfortunate Sisters, Mary, Elizabeth, and Catherine Johnson, and the Death-Bed Scene of Their Wretched Father, Allured by teachings of Owen.*

Owen was indeed too much bedeviled by the iconoclastic spirit to be acceptable as a reformer. In his great urge to smash the institution of marriage as fostered by the clergy, he gave out the impression that he was opposed to all marriage whatsoever. But Owen was no advocate of promiscuity. All that he ever demanded of the marriage relation was that it be based upon affection and that the whole relationship be made voluntary. Once more Owen looms up a full century ahead of his times.

CHAPTER XX

CHARITY AND MALICE

OWEN, HAVING proclaimed to the world his views on marriage, did not rest from his labors. Once more with a great flourish of trumpets he announced a new society to bring about the redemption of man. At a huge public meeting held on May 1, 1835, the Association of All Classes of All Nations came into being.

As usual at these meetings, Owen was called to preside. With natural dignity he acknowledged the demonstration made in his favor. He had now reached the stage in his career when his followers delighted to honor him, and he in turn looked upon them with fatherly concern.

Charity was the keynote of Owen's speech. But his charity was a little lacking when he referred to faith, the leading principle of those who followed the religious course:

Faith in things unseen and unknown, is the governing principle of the evil spirit of the world. *Charity* for the thoughts, feelings, and conduct of others, is the governing principle of the good spirit of the world. This faith is the father of ignorance, of lies, of arrogance and presumption, of violence and cruelty, and it is destructive of all charity....

* * * * *

The Association of All Classes of All Nations, therefore, adopts for its motto, Charity; for its governing principle, Charity; and for its conduct, Charity.¹

Toward the close of his address, Owen announced his determination to resign the office of Preliminary Father of the Association of All Classes of All Nations at the end of the first year, namely, May 14, 1836, when he would be sixty-five years old.² He wanted to devote his time to writing on his views, and especially did he want to write a history of his life: "A history of my life is also necessary to afford me the opportunity to disabuse the public mind of the bare-faced falsehoods relative to my proceedings, with which the religious world has attempted to fill it, by industriously inventing and propagating absurd fictions, contradictions, and

¹ "The Great Public Meeting on May 1st," *New Moral World*, I, 217-218 (May 9, 1835).

² See *Ibid.*, 225-231 (May 16, 1835).

inconsistencies respecting my plans, and by attributing the origin of the improvements which I have, at various times, introduced and proposed for the general benefit of society, to any other individual rather than to myself."³

The Association aimed to promulgate Owen's teachings to all parts of the world by forming branch associations in England and in foreign countries and by sending out paid missionaries to spread the gospel. The organization was to consist of a president, known as "The Father of the New Moral World," of a Senior Council of twelve, of a Junior Council of twelve, and of an Executive of six. The president was to be appointed by the unanimous choice of the two councils.

In those golden years of his messiahship, Owen christened babies and wrote endless memorials and letters to emperors, kings, prime ministers, and powerful newspapers. They thought him a little mad, but he went on preaching and believing that men could be made rational.

To those who thought of Owen in terms of practical reform and attainable objectives, he did indeed seem mad. But to men who believed that the most fundamental problems were ethical and religious, he must have appeared as a great teacher.

On one occasion, he wrote a very long letter to Sir Robert Peel after he had read the speech which Peel had delivered in Merchant Tailors' Hall on May 11. Owen held up Peel's father as a great ideal to him and called attention to Peel's lack of experience: "You have written as an Oxford-man, as a man of learning, as a man early initiated into office without experience of the world, as the leader of the late all-powerful political party, and as the man upon whom, in conjunction with his Grace the Duke of Wellington, that party depends to save it from gradually falling into annihilation."⁴

At the end of his letter, Owen gave this advice to Peel:

As a party man, you can no longer do good to yourself, your party, or your country. The period has arrived for you to shake off all party views, prejudices, and considerations; to take your stand as an independent individual member of the House of Commons, having your country to save by your conduct and example; and contend for new institutions and arrangements, to call the crushed and restrained power and energy of the British

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ May 26, 1835, in the *New Moral World*, I, 253-256 (June 6, 1835).

empire into full action, to give its population the character, the wealth, and the happiness which it ought now to enjoy, and to extend to all other nations.⁷

Owen sent petitions to the House of Lords and also to the Commons. In all these there was but one refrain: change the present system.

Owen wrote to Melbourne on June 1, 1835, begging him to make the changes necessary to bring about a happy and an intelligent society. He wrote of his "discoveries" about the nature of man's character and offered to go before the bars of the Lords and Commons to prove the truth of his principles.⁸

Lord Brougham and Lord John Russell also received letters from Owen importuning them to use their power to transform society. Spring-Rice, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Daniel O'Connell were not neglected. In fact, Owen passed no one by who might help him in gaining his objective.

It was fitting that Owen, the social father of the socialists, should put into one book the whole of his teachings. In 1836, being sixty-five years old, he brought out the first part of the *Book of the New Moral World*, as he styled the work destined to become the bible of his followers. The other parts were issued from time to time until the whole work was before the public.

The book contains nothing that Owen had not repeated many times before in one form or another, but it stood as the whole gospel gathered together so that all men might read his social message.

In the introduction, Owen set forth his fundamental dictum that poverty and ignorance are unnecessary. Once more he recited the paradox: Why is it that we go without, when production has been so vastly increased by the new machinery?

Malthus and his crowd of disciples he held to be wrong. There was plenty for all. The resources of the country were adequate. All that was needed was the application of knowledge. Chemistry would do wonders for the soil and agricultural production. But if in the remote future the communities should become too thickly populated, there was always the possibility of "swarming." Distant and backward lands beckoned to those who found the older civilizations too crowded. Like the Greek colonists of classical

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See the *New Moral World*, I, 261-263 (June 13, 1835).

times, the modern utopians would plant across the sea a community life modeled after the homeland.

Buddha-like, Owen laid down his "Five Fundamental Facts," his "Eighteen Evils," and "Twenty Laws of Human Nature." The "Five Fundamental Facts" are not new, but they give his philosophy of environment within reasonable compass :

1. That man is a compound being, whose character is formed of his constitution or organisation at birth, and of the effects of external circumstances upon it from birth to death: such original organization and external influence continually acting and reacting upon each other.

2. That man is compelled by his original constitution to receive his *feelings* and his *convictions* independently of his *will*.

3. That his feelings and his convictions, or both of them united, create the motive to action called the *Will*, which stimulates him to act and decides his actions.

4. That the organization of no two human beings is ever precisely similar at birth; nor can art subsequently form any two individuals, from infancy to maturity, to be precisely similar.

5. That nevertheless, the constitution of every infant, except in case of organic disease, is capable of being formed into a *very inferior* or a *very superior* being, according to the qualities of the external circumstances allowed to influence the constitution from birth⁷

From these "Five Fundamental Facts" Owen goes on to his "Twenty Fundamental Laws of Human Nature," in which he elaborates in great detail the principles to be followed in producing "a superior character."⁸ He develops no new ideas but merely restates his creed on the vast importance of proper education. Though his repetitions are wearisome beyond measure, his view of human nature as plastic material to mold in any shape desired is a refreshing one. All original sin has been purged from his ideal man, thus making possible a new race only a little below the angels.

Owen was indeed possessed of a glorious naïveté that heartened his generation and gave men of the nineteenth century a faith in the possibility of social reform that carried them far.

Throughout the whole book runs the refrain of education for all and happiness as the goal of all endeavor. This happiness could only be attained by building "Villages of Co-operation and Equality" with 500 to 2,000 inhabitants.

⁷ *Book of the New Moral World*, Pt. I, p. 1.

⁸ See *Ibid.*, 1-3.

There were to be eight ages in the life of the man of the New Moral World. From birth to five years of age, the child was to be the subject of the most careful training. He was to be loosely clothed and given exercise in the pure air, and under no circumstances was he to know rewards and punishments. Inhibitions of every kind were to be absolutely taboo in his education, but at the same time he was to be taught charity for others. Individual and selfish feelings were to be directed into contributing to the happiness of others.

In the second age, children from five to ten years old were to "discard the useless toys of the old world" and learn useful arts by actual practice. Book learning was to have little place in the educational process. Conversation with older persons and actually handling of objects were to be the means of gaining knowledge.

In the next age, from ten to fifteen, the children were to learn the use of mechanical devices and practice the more useful arts. All their work, according to Owen, was to be carried on with the greatest pleasure to themselves and to the community. Alas, he must have had experiences with children that most of us know not.

The youthful communists of the fourth age, from fifteen to twenty years, were to become men and women of a new race. They were to be physically, intellectually, and morally far ahead of any men who have ever lived upon this earth. In this period they were to be instructors of the class below them and also producers on their own account. But far more interesting in this age of their life, they were to mate and make happy and, in most cases, lasting unions.

These four classes, Owen hoped, would be able to produce all the wealth needed for the community. But to guard against possible failure, the fifth age, ranging from twenty to twenty-five, was to act as producers as well as instructors and directors of every branch of activity.

Those who had reached the age of twenty-five were to be freed from the necessity of producing goods. Their task was to be that of distribution, and that work would probably not occupy more than two hours of their time in the day. This happy age was to last until they were thirty years old, when they would enter a new class devoted to the internal affairs of the community. They would settle disputes and administer justice.

Lastly, those from forty to sixty years of age were to undertake the foreign affairs of the colony. They were to arrange for the sale of the surplus products and regulate the external trade. It was to be their task to keep the transportation system in good shape. Men in this class were to be encouraged to travel to other communities and also to journey around the world. Indeed, Owen visioned a world converted into pleasure gardens inhabited by happy, rational people living in communities of coöperation.⁹

In this new society, youth was to do the producing. It will be remembered that no one over twenty-five was to be called upon for productive work. We of the twentieth century disposed to shelve the older members of our society would scarcely suggest twenty-five as the age. It is quite apparent that Owen was much impressed with the possibilities of science. He hoped that chemistry and the continued use of machinery would accomplish much and that great economies could be effected by doing away with competition. But in his calculations he never reckoned on the necessity of building up a reserve of capital to buy machinery and the tools of production. Or, if he meant that each community was to be self-supporting, more labor than the amount he laid down would be necessary, unless the standard of living was to be kept very low.

Perhaps we should not take utopians too seriously. Their task is not to devise a scheme to fit a real society but rather one to delight our fancy.

The *Book of the New Moral World* was indeed a work of fancy; for Owen by this time had lost contact with the world of selfish human beings struggling for wealth and power. But at times he was mindful of the evils in the world, and in his book he reduced the causes of them to eighteen.

He started off his list with religions and followed with governments and all military and civil professions. He regarded the monetary systems of nations and the practice of buying and selling for profit, together with the whole system of producing and distributing wealth, as bad.

Owen regarded contests, whether individual or national, civil or military, as evils. And of course he attacked the "present practice of forming the character of man" He did not forget to include

⁹ See *Ibid.*, Pt. V, pp. 65-78.

the well-known and time-honored stand-bys of men—fraud and force. "Separate interests and universal disunion" fell in line for Owen's condemnation, and isolated families and distinct family concerns were also added. He showed himself to be a true modern in his denunciation of the practice of educating women to be "family slaves instead of superior companions." "The artificial indissoluble marriages of the priesthood" completed the list of evils that bedeviled the family. But Owen was by no means through with his catalogue of human shortcomings.

"Falsehood and deception, the strong oppressing the weak, and unequal education," all must be eradicated if the New Moral World was to be a reality. Likewise, "the levying of unequal taxes and expending them on inefficient measures" was among Owen's evils. And finally, he concluded by directing attention to the practice of producing "inferior wealth of all kinds, when the most superior would be more economical, and far more to be desired."¹⁰

Magnificent naïveté? Perhaps not. Maybe Owen saw all these evils flowing from the "practice of buying and selling for profit," as he spoke of the profit system, and not due to the inherent perversity of man. Owen certainly was not always clear in the way he wrote or spoke. A little prompting might well have led him to blame the profit system for our bad morals and manners even as the modern socialists have done. But in any case, Owen, the messiah, found in the community life ordered by reason and education the way to escape the evils of life.

Shortly after the publication of the first part of the *Book of the New Moral World* in 1836, reviews of it appeared in the newspapers and journals. Most of them took the view that Owen was a well-meaning, high-minded man, but that his theories were impractical. In *Bell's Weekly Messenger* of August, 1836, appeared a review in many respects characteristic of the others. The reviewer declared:

To call Robert Owen "a visionary," an "enthusiast," is only to take a part in the stupid chorus of the think-nothing and do-nothing grubs of the Metropolitan and Provincial Press; and, therefore, so we will not call him, although we may not have the honour of being "Owenites." We, in common with all unprejudiced men, most sincerely respect the benevolent liberality and arduous perseverance, the capacity, the intrepidity, with which Mr Owen has, through

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Pt. IV, p. 45.

evil report and good, pursued "the even tenor of his way," in the devoting of his life and large fortune towards forwarding the progression of what he, at least, believes to be the possible Perfectability of the Terrestrial Condition of the Human Race. As man, he has diligently laboured for us as men; and whether we in our individual judgments consider him to be right or wrong, in thought or in action, as men we ought honorably to pay tribute to the wisdom and nobleness of his intentions, whatever we may do to what we may consider to be their conventional tendency.¹¹

But in the end the reviewer found the schemes of Owen to be impractical: "The vast majority of the community [people of England], there can be but little question, look upon that system but as a gorgeously-inflated brain-balloon, with Mr. Owen for its adventurous aeronaut."¹²

The *Morning Advertiser* in its issue of August 15, after commenting favorably upon Owen as a man, declared:

His intentions are excellent, and his aspirations invariably, for the good of his fellow creatures; but here our commendations must cease; for any thing more impractical, or more visionary, in every respect, than his schemes we have never been acquainted with. He lives in a world of dreams, and though each dream proves in due time to be a mere phantom of the imagination: he never awakens to the mortifying reality that they are unfit to form the basis of a sound and practical system.¹³

Owen received hard blows from the *Morning Post* in its issue of September 14, 1836. In this paper he was denounced as a radical:

He would utterly subvert and destroy all the existing institutions, civil, political, and religious, of the civilized world, and re-create human nature itself, in the frantic expectation of establishing a Paradise on earth.¹⁴

But at the end the journal conceded that Owen had displayed considerable acuteness and ability in his treatment of the metaphysical questions involved.¹⁵ Of course, all alike recognized in Owen a necessitarian.

All this criticism touched Owen not. Any man who could pronounce the following prophecy stood little chance of being influenced by contrary opinions:

This is the third, or next state of existence; the one for which we are preparing; the New Moral World of man; the regenerated world, when men

¹¹ Cited by the *New Moral World*, II, 348 (August 27, 1836).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 349 (August 27, 1836).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 6 (October 29, 1836).

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*

shall be born again, and know each other, even as they know themselves; when swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; when *every man* shall sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid; and when divine knowledge, or truth unmixed with error, shall spread throughout all lands, and pervade all minds.¹⁰

By 1836 the storm against Owen was rising. He and his missionaries were now looked upon as infidels, dangerous to the well-being of the Church and the morals of Englishmen. Clergymen attended lectures given by Owen, Fleming, and other social missionaries. They came away alarmed at the expressions of irreligion, and some straightway issued challenges to debate. Owen came in for his share of the challenges; and, in spite of the advice of his friends, he accepted some of them. But that story belongs in another place.

Now came the year 1837. Owen was sixty-six; and, still filled with the crusading spirit, he crossed the Channel for a tour of the Continent. Once more he interviewed kings and ministers high in the state. Once more he importuned them to use their power to abolish forever the irrational society of "the old immoral world." But it was to end just as it ended twenty years before: "Mr. Owen, I agree with you perfectly. Submit your plans and details in writing." And that was all. He was bowed out. The poor grew poorer; the reign of ignorance continued; the priests and politicians practiced their frauds. How well did Owen remember in those days the words of Gentz: "It is not to our interest to educate the people."

There was a fine public dinner given Owen in Paris during the summer of 1837. On this occasion Owen made an address. He called upon the King, Louis Philippe, to form a new holy alliance. He also begged the French nation to throw off the yoke of "the old moral world" and enter into a better life by embracing the New Moral World.¹¹

While in Paris, Owen gave three lectures explaining his system. At one lecture given in the Hotel de Ville, he was asked a question relative to the place of labor in his social system. It appeared that the question was put to him by a follower of Charles Fourier, the social reformer. Owen, as usual, did not answer the question di-

¹⁰ "Property," *New Moral World*, I, 131 (February 21, 1835).

¹¹ See "Public Dinner in Paris, To Mr. Owen," *New Moral World*, III, 353-354 (August 26, 1837).

rectly, with the result that hostile newspapers announced to the public that "the great Mr. Owen" had been stumped.¹⁸

If Owen was not always convincing, he was everlastingly persistent and industrious. From capital to capital he marched, perpetually smiling benevolently. It was a strenuous ordeal for a man of sixty-six, but Owen was no ordinary man. We find him writing thus to George Fleming, a social missionary, from Vienna:

You will not conclude I am in bad health, or in riotous company, when I tell you that I am up almost every morning before five, and with my pen in my hand before six.¹⁹

Among the many whom Owen sought to interview was Louis, King of Bavaria. The King was a pretty busy man in 1837 and emphasized the fact in a brief note to Owen:

The King has plenty to do. Nousbibus, he will see Mr. Owen but for a moment only and if the gentleman has proposals to make he may if it pleases to him send them written because without this the King should be obliged to make a protocolist for what he possesses no time.²⁰

And so Owen, armed with his plan of salvation, was ushered into the presence of the King, who listened respectfully for a few minutes and then gave the signal that sent the English philanthropist on his way. It was all part of the day's business to Louis, but to Owen it meant a chance that his plans might be adopted by a kingdom.

In Berlin, Owen again met the versatile Baron von Humboldt. That eminent scientist called on him and listened an hour while Owen explained the beauties of his system. Apparently Humboldt was interested, for he listened an hour and a half more when Owen returned the visit a day or two later. In departing Owen left the *Book of the New Moral World* for Humboldt to read.²¹ Owen had already interviewed Metternich; Baron Lindeman, prime minister of Saxony; and many others high in affairs. There was nothing more that he could do but go home to England and wait for the new day to dawn.

¹⁸ See the *New Moral World*, III, 377 ff. (September 16, 1837). Owen's version of the matter was that it would have taken several lectures to explain the answer to the question.

¹⁹ October 21, 1837, in the *New Moral World*, IV, 21-22 (November 11, 1837).

²⁰ October 1, 1837, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

²¹ See letter of Owen to Alger, November 29, 1837, in *New Moral World*, IV, 62 (December 16, 1837).

On his return from the Continent, Owen faced the clergy in arms ready to do battle against infidelity. The opposition to him had been rising steadily since the missionaries of the Association of All Classes had taken the field.

In the spring of 1837 before Owen left for his Continental tour, he had engaged in a public discussion of his views with the Reverend J. H. Roebuck of Manchester. The discussion was carried on with the utmost good feeling by both men. Owen, as usual, took the position that man is not free to believe as he wishes but is entirely a creature of circumstance or environment; while Roebuck countered by asking Owen how he could possibly be rational, when according to his own statement he was surrounded by irrational circumstances. How could the rational come out of the irrational?²²

Indeed, Owen did not answer this point made against him. It was an argument used over and over by his opponents in the long years of his messiahship, but it did nothing to shatter his faith in his principles.

Roebuck scored another hit against his rival when Owen asked him if he had ever seen spirit apart from matter. He replied by declaring that he would tell Owen as much about spirit as Owen could tell him about matter.²³ For the greater part, the debate was like most of Owen's discussions with opponents: it ran along parallel lines, but he was always glad for an opportunity to explain his views.

Reverend John Brindley, one of the most aggressive of the clerical opponents of socialism, was a man of very different stamp from Roebuck. Brindley moved up and down the kingdom seeking to destroy the socialists root and branch. He was resourceful in debate and possessed no nice scruples about conduct. Any expedient whatsoever, no matter how dubious, was acceptable to him in discrediting the socialists. Owen heard from all directions the frightened cries of his missionaries begging the master to come and do battle with the terrible Brindley.

In an evil hour for him, Owen accepted a challenge made by Brindley and met him in the town hall at Worcester January 7, 1839. There was a great crowd of Brindley's supporters present.

²² See *Public Discussion Between Robert Owen, Late of New Lanark, and the Rev. J. H. Roebuck, of Manchester*, p. 22.

²³ See *Ibid.*, 55, 58.

The chairman of the meeting was a Dr. Malden, who on every possible occasion showed his partiality for the cause that Brindley was championing. In such a setting with the audience, chairman, and an opponent hostile, it is small wonder that Owen had a rough time.

When Brindley arose to speak, he placed the Bible on one side of the table before him, and on the other side he placed the *Book of the New Moral World* and Owen's *Ten Lectures on Marriage*. Then in a most demanding tone he asked Owen to confess that these works expressed correctly his ideas. When Owen agreed they did, Brindley proceeded to point out the dangerous and foolish character of the ideas contained in them. At one moment in his attack, he paused; and then with dramatic fervor he asked: "If Socialism be true, what will you gain thereby?" A voice—"Nothing." "What do you gain, on the contrary, if the Bible be true?" A voice—"Eternal life."²⁴

While Owen was speaking in defense of his works, Brindley frequently interrupted him by such expressions as "Irrational and insane books?"²⁵ The chairman of the meeting did nothing to stop him. In fact, he too chimed in with words of approval. And so the "social father" found himself in very unsympathetic company.

The climax of the debate at Worcester came when Owen turned to a discussion of marriage: "Two young persons of the same rank of life, favorably situated in point of fortune, agree with the consent of their parents to be married. The priesthood had surrounded this ceremony with all the solemn circumstances which they know how to create and these young persons were seduced—"²⁶ Owen never finished the sentence that night. The uproar that followed the dangerous word "seduced" was such as to end the meeting right there and then.

In vain did Owen attempt to set himself aright by protesting in a letter to Dr. Malden, chairman of the meeting. In the letter he explained that the word "seduced" was used in an entirely innocent sense. Owen requested that the letter be published in the Worcester newspapers, but his plea was denied.²⁷ And so Owen

²⁴ "Worcester—Discussion Between Mr. Brindley and Mr. Owen," *Worcester Chronicle*, n.d., cited by the *New Moral World*, V, 193-196 (January 19, 1839).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See the *New Moral World*, V, 196 (January 19, 1839).

became still more suspect as an advocate of free love and other doctrines dangerous to the morals of Englishmen.

Brindley was not through with Owen. Indeed, he found in him a splendid source of revenue and notoriety. A week later he met him at Birmingham before a packed house. Once more he tore into Owen with all his arguments and cheap tricks, and once more Owen attempted vainly to spread the gospel of the New Moral World to a hostile audience.

In this second meeting with Brindley, Owen came out as a geographical environmentalist. In fact, he anticipated Buckle by a decade or two. He maintained that a study of history would reveal that religious convictions were merely the result of geographical circumstances. And then he went much further and reached a point away beyond the dreams of Buckle, Rätzl, and even Huntington. He declared that if he be told the latitude and longitude of a place, he would give the religious convictions of the populations as well as their general habits, manners, and customs.²⁸

In these two meetings with Brindley, Owen had proved himself no match for such a man. It seemed to be Brindley's purpose to put on a good show for the benefit of his supporters, and to gain that end he spared no mud. But Owen looked upon these encounters as opportunities to explain his system.

About a year later when Owen was in Burslem, he met Brindley at the White Sheaf Inn, where the latter sought to persuade Owen to meet him in debate again. Owen refused, declaring that until Brindley acquired the manners and habits of a gentleman he would have nothing to do with him. It seems Brindley had insinuated that Owen's behavior as a husband was not above suspicion. Brindley declared he had the proof, but his charges were proved false by Owen's followers.

Unfortunately for Owen, he weakened in his resolution not to meet Brindley. In 1841 he was invited to come to Bristol and debate with Brindley on the subject: "What is Socialism and what would be the practical effects on Society?" The meetings were held on January 5, 6, and 7. Once more Owen was compelled to face the abuse of Brindley, the prejudice of the chairman, and a hostile audience.

²⁸ See "Discussion Between Mr. Owen and Mr. Brindley," *Birmingham Journal*, n.d., cited by the *New Moral World*, V, 260-262 (February 16, 1839).

Brindley accused Owen of being an atheist, because he did not believe in the Bible from cover to cover. He branded Owen's marriage system as a scheme to secure a "new wife quarterly," and then he pinned on Owen the authorship of some passages in reality taken from Shelley's notes on his *Queen Mab*. The lines quoted by Brindley appeared in an appendix to Owen's lectures on marriage, where they were inserted without his knowledge.²⁹ They ran as follows:

Chastity is a monkish and evangelical superstition, a greater foe to natural temperance even than unintellectual sensuality; it strikes at the root of all domestic happiness, and consigns more than half of the human race to misery, that some few may monopolize according to law. A system could not well have been devised more studiously hostile to human happiness than marriage.

While the lines from Shelley may have been inserted without his consent, Owen certainly gave his blessing to the poet's ideas on marriage. Thomas Medwin, in his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, writes of going with James Lawrence to the Owenite chapel on Charlotte Street:

In the ante-room, I observed a man at a table, on which were laid for sale, among many works on a small scale, this *History of the Nairs*,³⁰ and *Queen Mab*, and after the discourse by Owen—a sort of doctrinal rather than moral essay, in which he promised his disciples a millennium of roast beef and fowls, and three or four days' recreation out of the seven, equal division of property, and an universality of knowledge by education,—we had an interview with the lecturer and reformer, whom I had met some years before at the house of a Northumberland lady. On finding that I was connected with Shelley, he made a long panegyric on him, and taking up one of the *Queen Mabs* from the table, read, premising that it was the basis of one of his chief tenets, the following passage:

How long ought the sexual connection to last? What law ought to specify the extent of the grievance that should limit its duration? A husband and wife ought to continue so long united as they love one another. Any law that should bound them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection, would be a most intolerable tyranny, and most unworthy of toleration.³¹

In the end Owen and the socialists were made to look pretty odious in the eyes of the working classes of Bristol. It appeared

²⁹ See *Public Discussion Between John Brindley and Robert Owen on the Question, What Is Socialism*. . . .

³⁰ A work by James Lawrence seeking to establish the supremacy of woman.

³¹ Pp. 97-98.

that the clergy were most interested in saving the lower orders from being contaminated by Owen's heresies.

In those years of the late 'thirties and the early 'forties, Owen and his little band of missionaries were repeatedly challenged to public discussions. The clergy led the attack, fired by the example of the Bishop of Exeter, who stood up in the House of Lords and denounced Lord Melbourne for presenting Owen to the Queen.

One of the most effective of the social missionaries was Lloyd Jones, who met Brindley in debate at Macclesfield just before the affair at Bristol and then again in May, 1841, at Birmingham. The Birmingham debate was a kind of free-for-all fight staged in Ryan's Circus. Jones appears to have given Brindley a severe drubbing in an atmosphere charged with superheated emotionalism. Indeed, the audiences at these "public discussions" were quite as active as the principals. In a contemporary report of the meeting at Birmingham, we read that the great throng that attended was "steamed to death" when time was called at the finish. The discussions were in reality sporting events where each side had its supporters ready to do battle. The social missionaries were often guarded by their followers and by the police. In many cases they were brutally beaten and driven from meeting places. While Owen was in the Potteries in 1840, he was set upon by a mob and compelled to seek refuge in the house of Enoch Wood of Burslem.

The missionaries were often accused of blasphemy. And of course there was a law making it a crime to speak ill of the Deity; therefore, many of the clergy attended lectures given by such men as Lloyd Jones and Alexander Campbell to catch them in any overt act. Brindley was particularly inclined to watch Lloyd Jones. The latter gave a lecture in which he linked Robert Owen with Moses, Christ, and Luther. But this was not blasphemy within the meaning of the law.

The mounting fear of the clergy that socialism, with its attack upon revealed religion, would wean Englishmen from the Church reached a climax when Melbourne presented Owen to the Queen.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MONKEY DRESS AND THE VIRGIN QUEEN

IN THE MIDST of ecclesiastical "alarums and excursions," when churchmen faced socialists in shining armor ready to drive them from their agelong prerogatives, Owen, the infidel, was honored by the Prime Minister. He was presented to the young Queen on June 26, 1839. There is no evidence to show that Victoria knew how sympathetic her father was with the philanthropist of New Lanark; nor is there any proof that she was aware of Owen's generosity to him.

The occasion for the presentation was a petition Owen bore from the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists. This society was the heir and descendent of the Association of All Classes of All Nations.

Though Owen was only one of many to be honored that day, his presentation to the Queen, together with the growing strength of the socialists, furnished the excuse for a violent criticism of Melbourne and his government in the House of Lords. The Tory Bishop of Exeter, Henry Phillpotts, led the attack on Melbourne. The Bishop was a notoriously reactionary churchman opposed to all reforms and therefore welcomed the chance to embarrass the party that had done much to strike at the privileges of the clergy.

On the evening of January 24, 1840, his grace of Exeter opened fire on Melbourne's government in the House of Lords. He arose with a petition in his hand signed by four thousand clergy, merchants, and traders of Birmingham protesting against socialism. The signers were disturbed over the loose moral principles promulgated by Owen and his missionaries. The Bishop in great indignation turned to the Marquess of Normanby, head of the Home Office, and demanded that he proceed against the socialists as violators of the law.

Normanby had already declared that "the socialists had not offended against the law." But Exeter, apparently determined to strike at Normanby, persisted in his attack, calling attention to the law known as the "57th of George III" directed against organizations which sent representatives to meet other bodies. He went

on at a great length quoting from Owen's writings to prove that Owen and his followers planned the overthrow of all the existing institutions, including marriage. Of course Exeter did not fail to quote Owen's characterization of marriage as a "satanic institution," an "accursed thing," and a "cunningly devised fable of the priesthood."

The Bishop, warming to his subject, gave examples of the complicity of the mayor of Coventry in granting the use of the guild hall to the socialists but refusing it to Brindley, who was attempting to stem the tide of the subversive doctrines in Coventry. All this proved to the Bishop that the "Municipal Corporation Reform bill was a most disgraceful measure." It had taken the government of cities and towns out of the hands of a self-perpetuating oligarchy and made it more democratic.

The Bishop could do nothing about mayors, but he could insist that appointees of the crown be free from the taint of socialism. And so he demanded that William Pare, superintendent registrar of births, marriages, and deaths, no longer "pollute that office." Pare was a socialist and warm admirer of Owen; he did not conceal his sympathy for the cause; and because his office was one under the control of the Home Office, Exeter and his supporters made enough clamor to secure his resignation.

The zealous Bishop spared few details in his efforts to move the government to action against the socialists. At one time in his speech he read a report from one who had attended a socialist meeting:

At the Socialists place of meeting, Birmingham, only so late as Sunday evening last, the 19th of January, the Socialist missionary stationed there thus spoke of God—"What a monstrous God! Who would call him a just God? I say he is a bloody and barbarous God, and we will not serve him." On Sunday evening, Nov. 25, 1839, the same missionary at the same place said—"Neither he nor the Socialists, acknowledged that vindictive Being called the Lord of Hosts! Preserve us from such a Lord of Hosts."¹

The Bishop assured the Lords that this specimen of blasphemy was not the worst. He was loath to shock their lordships' ears by instances of more obscene blasphemies. He did not explain, however, that these shocking characterizations of Jehovah might have

¹ Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*, 3d ser., LI, 523. House of Lords, session of Friday, January 24, 1840.

been lifted out of a discussion of the Old Testament, where the Lord of Hosts often tangled Himself up with very mundane affairs.

In his tirade against the socialists, the Bishop made much of Melbourne's encouragement to them by his presentation of Owen to the Queen. With great unction, he denounced that indiscretion.

Lord Melbourne, in the face of the Bishop's attack supported by other churchmen, denounced socialism and excused himself for having presented Owen to court by declaring that he could not be responsible for the opinions of everyone he presented to Her Majesty. The easygoing Premier went on to argue that a prosecution of the socialists might not prove the best course to pursue in stopping their growth.

The Duke of Wellington was inclined to side with the Bishop of Exeter, but he did not think it the best policy to take extreme measures against the socialists. He remarked before he sat down that it appeared Melbourne neither knew Owen nor his doctrines before he presented him to court and thus had broken a rule of court etiquette, which provided that no gentleman should present another unless acquainted with him.

"Viscount *Melbourne*. Oh yes; I was acquainted with his person."

The Duke said he was not aware that the noble Viscount had ever seen Mr. Owen.

Lord Brougham presented a petition from Owen asking for an investigation of socialism. Brougham spoke in defense of Owen's character and insisted that he had never heard any attack upon marriage, property, or religion by Owen.

His Lordship's memory was at fault here, for he must have been very much aware of what Owen said on the memorable evening in the City of London Tavern when he denounced all three institutions. But Brougham was Owen's friend though not his disciple by any means.

The Bishop of Exeter and his colleagues had another session in the House of Lords on the subject of Owen and the socialists. There were more allusions to "chilling blasphemies" and more cuts at Melbourne for his encouragement of that "unhappy man," Owen. The Prime Minister found himself compelled to berate the socialists with great gusto. But he stood his ground on the inadvisability of starting prosecutions against them and argued that the churchmen

² *Ibid.*, 546. House of Lords, session of Friday, January 24, 1840.

by their publicity of socialism were presenting Owen again to the court. In the end, after the bishops had spent their fire, the Lords agreed upon an inquiry. But the easygoing Prime Minister did nothing, thus living up to his philosophy and reputation.

Robert Owen and the socialists had indeed aroused the fears of the clergy. Already the Church had been subjected to a number of reforms very much overdue, and the radical members of Parliament demanded more. Not a little of the vehemence that Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, expressed against socialism was due to fear that Parliament might go still further in cleaning up the abuses within the Church. The clergy must be made to appear the protector of popular morality. But for one word of solicitude he expressed for the spiritual welfare of the people, he spoke ten to indicate his dislike for the liberals who had insisted upon a more efficient Church.

Owen had every right to speak of the priesthood as parasitic. The enormous revenues drawn by a few higher churchmen were a scandal known to all men. Horace Walpole in his *History of England from 1815* wrote of the findings of the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1836:

The inquiries of the Commission established the fact, which had previously been surmised, that the net revenues of the Church amounted to nearly £3,500,000 a year. The gross annual income of the 27 individuals who constituted the Episcopate amounted to £150,000; the revenues of the Cathedral establishments absorbed a further £217,000; while the 10,700 beneficed clergy, who carried on the real work of the Church, received only £3,050,000 among them. But these figures only imperfectly illustrated the unequal manner in which the wealth of the Church was distributed. It was admitted by the Commissioners that Durham was worth £15,800, Canterbury £17,000, London £12,200, Ely £11,500, and Winchester £10,700 a year, while critics who wrote with less kindly feelings towards the Church placed the revenues of these sees at far higher sums, and declared that the smaller estimates had only been arrived at by ignoring much of the valuable property which the bishops really possessed.³

In order that some of the bishops who were not so fortunate in their revenues should have supplemental incomes, a most widespread system of pluralities grew up. Many high ecclesiastical officers held livings or benefices for which they gave no services whatever but drew fat stipends, nevertheless. Revenues that should

³ Vol. V, 256.

have gone to the working clergy found their way into the pockets of a few who did little or nothing.

Reforms came in 1836 and the years following, when a better distribution of the Church revenues was accomplished; but many other abuses persisted. The Ecclesiastical Courts with all of their privileges and anomalous practices lasted until 1860, and Dissenters continued to be barred from the great universities.

In the face of so many evils and so much spiritual indifference, it is small wonder that dissent and rationalism made their way in Britain. Owen's rationalism was not always discreet, but it was never bitter nor altogether unfair. Sometimes his missionaries went beyond the bounds of good taste, as might be expected from men overzealous in a cause.

Owen's instructions to them, however, were truly filled with the spirit of charity. He admonished them not to engage in contests with those who held the old errors and prejudices. But they must put before them "calmly and mildly" the "self-evident truths" of their science.

"By attacking error in any other manner, or in any other spirit, you violate your own principles, and act in opposition to your religion of charity," Owen told his missionaries. "The period for these religious contests has already ceased with all minds approaching rationality. The parties who will now desire them have had their feelings made too irritable and diseased to be benefitted by such contests. You will therefore, apply to these deluded and deceived parties the same undeviating kind treatment that judicious physicians adopt to their patients, who are not in a sane or sound state of mind."⁴

The whole kingdom reverberated with protesting voices over the presentation business. Clergymen preached sermons on it, and newspapers and journals carried articles running into long columns railing against the iniquity of presenting Owen, the infidel, to the Virgin Queen.

The *Manchester Chronicle* felt that the Prime Minister was truckling to the radical faction:

How much longer are these insults to the religious feeling of the nation to be tolerated? Is this the price of the support of the low Radical faction in the

⁴ "Mr. Owen to the Social Missionaries," *New Moral World*, VI, 593-597 (July 13, 1839).

House of Commons?—or is it a cool premeditated insult to the Christian people of this land?⁵

The *Manchester Courier* was still more vehement in denouncing Melbourne as “degenerate.”

The premier of England, the Chaperon of a notorious infidel in the court of a young Queen! What, past all shame, my lord? If it is so, why not boldly play your part at once; openly scoff at common decency, and avow yourself the enemy of every moral and religious principle.⁶

The Times printed an article taken from *Britannia* in which Owen was spoken of as a “shrewd scoundrel.” This characterization came after comment on the court episode.⁷

A few weeks later *The Times* wrote in the following vein :

We have also a word or two to say in regard to Owen’s alleged benevolence, which the Marquis of Normanby thought fit to insinuate was practiced by him “to excess.” That this egotistic old Welchman has spent a deal of money in the diabolical attempt to *Owenize* the community, we do not mean to deny; but where did that money come from, and under what understanding did he receive it? When Owen, who originally had scarcely a shilling of his own, married Miss Dale, of Glasgow, with whom he obtained a large fortune, he was a rigid orthodox Dissenter. In virtue of his religious profession *alone* he inherited the immense funds of David Dale, his father-in-law, who, had he entertained the slightest anticipation of Owen’s apostacy, would sooner have engulfed them in the Clyde.⁸

After commenting on the horror Dale would have felt if he had known of the prostitution of his property, *The Times* wound up with this jab at Owen: “What is called Owen’s benevolence, therefore, is substantially a breach of trust.”⁹

The same charges appeared in *Grant’s London Journal* with the addition of a description of Owen as he appeared before his audiences dressed in “a fashionable pea green coat, a fancy waistcoat, etc. . . .”

The *New Moral World* emphatically denied the “pea green coat” charge, declaring that Owen always wore black.¹⁰

⁵ No date given, cited in “Mr. Owen at Court,” *New Moral World*, VI, 601–602 (July 13, 1839).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See *The Times* (London), January 8, 1840.

⁸ No date given. Cited by “The ‘Times’ and Mr. Owen,” *New Moral World*, VII, 1120–1121 (February 22, 1840).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See “Attack on Mr. Owen’s Character, by ‘Grant’s London Journal,’” *New Moral World*, VII, 1281–1282 (May 2, 1840).

Owen answered the accusation about his use of the Dale fortune in his *Manifesto*:

Whatever funds I may have expended, with the view of emancipating the world from ignorance, poverty, division, sin, and misery, I had previously earned by my own well-directed industry; and instead of gaining wealth by my marriage—as the *Times* newspaper falsely, in every particular, states—I expended many thousand pounds of my own property, after the death of Mr. Dale, my father-in-law, in keeping the family which he left, while they were young and unprotected, and for which I was never repaid, nor expect repayment.

This attack upon Owen's integrity was only a sample of the mud hurled at him in those years when he was under the fire of the Church.

Sermons were preached against him, the same man who had once dined with the lords of the Church. And even the dissenting preachers found him dangerous. One preacher in particular, John Eustace Giles, a Baptist, delivered three lectures against socialism at Leeds. Giles declared that he had approached the study of socialism with a tolerant attitude, but he soon found in his perusal of socialist pamphlets "so many *impious and licentious* principles; so many hypocritical pretenses, notwithstanding, to virtue and philanthropy; so many *apologies for crime*; so much *inveterate hatred to civil government*; so many *artful contrivances to ensnare the superficial* by crude metaphysical subtleties, the indolent by promises of luxury without labour, and the sensual by a *perpetual eulogy of the animal appetites*, and the prospect of, a *Mohomedan Paradise*, as awakened in my mind a detestation of the system to which I was previously a stranger."¹¹

While the storm was at its height, Owen issued a manifesto giving his position on the presentation affair:

And now for my presentation to her Majesty. May I ask, who was the party most honoured on this occasion?—the man of nearly seventy years, who had spent more than a half a century in collecting rare wisdom, solely that he might apply it for the benefit of his suffering fellow-creatures, and who, that he might effect future important objects for the ignorant and degraded race of man, submitted to cover himself with a monkey-like dress and bend the knee to a young female, amiable no doubt, but yet inexperienced—or the minister, who introduced [induced] him to undergo this necessary form of etiquette, and

¹¹ J. E. Giles, *Socialism as a Religious Theory Irrational and Absurd*. . . . Preface of First Lecture.

afterwards, in a speech, containing much real nonsense, shrunk from defending that act of his own—an act which will, perhaps, yet prove to have been the best and most important act of his administration—or the exalted young lady to whom age bent its knee? I deem it no honour to be presented to any human being, trained and educated irrationally as all have been.¹²

Owen had issued a proclamation on January 1, 1840, announcing the millennium for the forthcoming year. It was to be the year when the poor were to find plenty by following the way of the New Moral World. But the year passed without that event transpiring. In fact, the prophet found the poor and lowly less disposed to listen to the words of truth than ever before.

One Monday in June of 1840, Owen, accompanied by Alexander Campbell, one of the social missionaries, was set upon by a mob at Burslem in Staffordshire. He had attempted to lecture in the face of opposition aroused by a handbill circulated in the town before his scheduled evening lecture. The bill indicated the nature of the grievances against Owen :

OWEN AGAIN! at Dalehall. Mr Owen, *after being driven out of Newcastle and Stoke*, is coming here to night, at six o'clock, to propagate his BLASPHEMOUS PRINCIPLES. Will you have him after *Friday night's exposure*. If not, ASSEMBLE before the Meeting, in a peaceable and orderly manner ; and respectfully, but firmly and decidedly, declare this Poison shall no more be retailed among us.¹³

On this particular occasion, Owen was saved from the roughness of the mob by being spirited away by constables to the home of Enoch Wood.

There were many that might be counted as Owen's friends who did not like his antireligious attitude. Some of them wrote letters to him protesting against what they chose to call his "infidelity."

Richard Oastler, who saw eye to eye with Owen on factory legislation, was plainly grieved at his religious heresies :

I know, my dear friend, that you wish me well—"Yet one thing thou lackest. Thou has indeed sold all and given to the poor." But "thou has taken away my Lord and I know not where thou hast laid him."¹⁴

¹² "Manifesto of Robert Owen, the Discoverer and Founder of the Rational System of Society, and of the Rational Religion," *New Moral World*, VII, 1097-1100 (February 15, 1840).

¹³ "Brutal Attack on Mr. Owen, and Mr. A. Campbell . . .," *New Moral World*, VIII, 16 (July 4, 1840).

¹⁴ Letter of Richard Oastler to Robert Owen, October 19, 1836, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

Owen paid scant heed to such protests. Oastler and his other friends, in his opinion, were simply mistaken and benighted, as were those who chased him through the streets. Every day that he lived he felt the bitter resentment of the clergy and the religious interests.

The townspeople of Leeds called a meeting for the relief of the poor sometime in the latter part of 1839. Owen heard the news in London and started north in great haste accompanied by Fleming and Hobson. So great was his anxiety to participate in the meeting that he traveled night and day, sleeping only five hours in two days. But when they reached the courthouse, where the meeting was taking place, the clergy present objected to Owen's participation on the grounds that he was not an inhabitant of Leeds.

Owen was armed with a set of propositions which he insisted upon presenting to the meeting. And in spite of the gentle protests of a Mr. Baines, who was anxious for harmony, Owen rose to present his plan or propositions for permanent relief of the poor. No sooner had he gained his feet than the gentlemen of the cloth set up a great hissing and yelling, with the result that Owen sat down. In the end, the mayor decided that Owen should not be heard because he was not an inhabitant of Leeds.¹⁵

A few days later, Owen called his own meeting and put through his propositions for the relief of the poor of Leeds, a compromise over the plans presented by Owen at a much earlier time. In his Leeds plan, he said nothing about self-supporting communities. But he did lay down the principle that the unemployed would be able to support themselves by working one-fourth of their time and have enough surplus to repay the capital with interest used to employ them.

Some of the other principles are of peculiar interest to us now. For instance, the unemployed should not be kept in idleness unless they were unable to work, and they should be put to the task of creating the first necessities of life for themselves and their families. Their expenses, Owen held, should be kept at the lowest amount possible with due regard for good health. The capital necessary to make the unemployed productive was to be gained by mortgaging the poor rates for ten years.

¹⁵ See "Breaking up the System. What Next?" *New Moral World*, VII, 1001-1002 (January 4, 1840).

Owen could not resist the opportunity to whack away at the economic system where the increased productive power of labor brought only distress and want.¹⁸

And so Owen looked upon all of his practical schemes as mere makeshifts. The whole irrational society must be scrapped to make way for a new one.

Owen being nearly seventy years old, it was high time that he withdrew from the field of violent controversy and settled down in the quiet gardens of reflection and ease. But the fiery spirit of the crusader still blazed within him. He traveled to America determined to settle the Oregon boundary dispute. At Queenwood he sought vainly to build the ideal city of the New Moral World. When the Revolution of 1848 shook the thrones of Europe, he was ready with the blueprints for the building of a new order. And he sent a never-ending stream of letters to those high in political office begging them to proclaim the new day.

¹⁸ See "Adoption of Mr. Owen's Views by a Public Meeting in Leeds," *New Moral World*, VII, 1012-1014 (January 11, 1840).

CHAPTER XXII

THE ETERNAL VISION

THE DREAM of creating an ideal community never faded from Owen and his disciples. As the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists increased in numbers and established branches, the old urge to form a community seized hold of them. In the fall of 1839, the society leased an estate of 533 acres at Tytherly called Queenwood.

The story of Queenwood reads very much like the history of New Harmony. There were too many people for the accommodations, and the people who came were apparently not fitted for the work to be done. But it also differed in some respects from the New Harmony adventure. A spacious building was erected at a very heavy expense to house the members of the colony. This was done under the governorship of Owen himself, who was elected to that office by the Congress of the Rational Religionists. Owen, having dictatorial powers conferred upon him, proceeded to the most extravagant expenditures in the erection of buildings and improvement of grounds. Some money had been raised as the result of the activities of the Home Colonization Society, organized by Owen for the purpose of backing the colony. A few wealthy men such as William Galpin and Frederick Bate gave comparatively large sums, but the money soon sank out of sight in Owen's endeavor to construct a community that would be indeed the "Commencement of the Millennium."

By the spring of 1842, when the congress of the society met, the affairs of the colony were brought under review. While the financial position of the enterprise was far from satisfactory, the members of the congress were hopeful of ultimate success. It was necessary, however, to dismiss the whole staff of missionaries in order to cut down expenses.¹

Owen continued to spend money without any regard for the inevitable day of reckoning. It came in July of 1842, when the congress once more assembled to deal with the sad state of the finances

¹ See "Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Congress of the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists," *New Moral World*, X, 381-392 (May 28, 1842).

at Queenwood. The enterprise was deep in debt, and the buildings and improvements already started needed money to complete them.

While Owen was not exactly under fire, he felt it necessary to make a very long speech of justification for his management of the place. He had hoped for support that never materialized, and being oversanguine and unchecked by anyone, he brought the colony to near ruin. Under the circumstances there was only one thing to do—resign from the governorship. And he did that without protest.

The colony carried on limpingly for three years more. Owen resumed the governorship in 1843 and continued his reign of extravagance and mismanagement. The climax came in the congress of 1844, when a rebellion against Owen was staged in the society. The congress for the first time refused to elect Owen chairman of the meeting and passed resolutions curtailing his power. Owen declared that he would not be subjected to dictation and offered his resignation as governor of Harmony, as Queenwood was called, and as president of the Rational Society. Much to his surprise, the congress accepted his resignation; and now, for the first time, Owen found himself no longer the controlling head of the organization he had founded.² Though he had been dictatorial and at times difficult to work with, he was generally respected and loved.

The new management of Harmony found itself in great difficulties. And in spite of drastic economies, the colony, unable to escape from the burden of debt, finally passed out of existence in 1845.

It was Owen's last community. He had exhausted his funds entirely and henceforth lived on \$1,800 a year sent to him from his children in America. Robert Dale Owen wrote to his father in 1844, apparently before the latter sailed for America, and suggested a plan for taking care of his father's financial needs. He expanded a debt due the father from \$3,200 to \$20,400 and declared that he, Robert Dale, and Richard agreed to convey 7,500 acres of land to a trustee to be sold as soon as possible, the funds to be invested at six per cent or six and one half per cent for the benefit of the father. He added that if Robert Fauntleroy, husband of Jane, agreed they would make it \$30,000.³ This arrangement appears to have been carried out.

² See "Meeting of Congress," *New Moral World*, XII, 377-379.

³ See letter of Robert Dale Owen to Robert Owen, September 18, 1844, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

Owen sailed to America in the fall of 1844, where he visited his children in New Harmony and gave lectures in the old manner, although he was now seventy-three years old. As in 1824, Owen wrote and published an address to the people of the United States. He explained that he came to reestablish the good feeling between the United States and Great Britain which it had been his lot to promote after 1830. It will be recalled that he visited President Jackson and Secretary Van Buren before he left America in 1829 and sought to bring about better relations between the two countries.

Owen was mindful of the acuteness of the situation arising over the Oregon controversy. His son, Robert Dale, now a representative in Congress, had kept him informed of the position of the United States. Sometime before he sailed for America, Owen prophesied that the United States and Great Britain would go to war over Oregon. Writing in the *New Moral World*, he declared that thousands and tens of thousands of lives may be slaughtered, and millions upon millions of the wealth of both empires, be far worse than merely wasted or squandered; and this merely for the possession of some parcel of land called Oregon, in the far-west, while both empires already possess millions upon millions of miles of land, of which they know not how to make any rational use.⁴

After Owen's arrival in America, the presidential election was decided with James Polk, a definite expansionist, victorious over Clay. The cry now went up in America of "54° 40' or fight."

Owen went home to England during the summer of 1845 but came back after a few weeks filled with the peace-making fervor. He stayed on through the fall and winter much agitated over the course the controversy was taking. His son, Robert Dale, was also deeply concerned and showed his loyalty to the country of his adoption by making a speech in the House of Representatives in January, 1844, attacking the aggressive policy of Great Britain. In the spring of 1846, Owen journeyed back to New York for a passage home to England. Just before he sailed, a letter came to him from his son counseling that he place before the British cabinet the urgency of settling upon the forty-ninth parallel at once as the boundary. Robert Dale wrote that "Webster made one mistake when he said public opinion is settling down on 49°. The truth is,

⁴ "President's Address on the Increasing Absurdity, Insanity, and Madness of the British and North American Governments and People," *New Moral World*, XII, 293 (March 9, 1844).

it has settled down on it, and will settle away from it again, if that which ought to be done is not done quickly."⁵

No sooner had Owen landed than he sought and gained an interview with Lord Aberdeen, foreign secretary. Owen laid before him information given by his son and urged haste in settling the dispute. Owen also wrote a letter to Peel explaining the dangers and difficulties in delay. In one part of the letter he took pains to emphasize the good work he had done for peace and the influence he possessed in Washington :

In my recent interview with Lord Aberdeen he appeared to forget the entire change of feeling in 1830 in favour of this country with the American Government, and still less to be aware of what I have done in Washington and over the United States during the present Congress in favour of peace with this country.⁶

Peel acknowledged Owen's letter but refused to see him. He wrote that Owen's communication added nothing that Her Majesty's government did not know about the question, and he could not see any advantage in meeting Owen himself.⁷ A few days later Peel again wrote to Owen. This time he was almost sharp in his refusal to bring Owen into the Oregon question. He insisted that "no public advantage would be gained by Owen's authorized interference in the matter."⁸

Owen wrote more letters, but he was never able to get near Peel, nor did he succeed in seeing Aberdeen again.

Summer came. Peel went down to defeat before a combination of Tories, Irish members, and radicals ; Russell came in with Lord Palmerston, the bold one, at the Foreign Office. But meantime, Aberdeen offered to settle on the basis of the forty-ninth parallel, and the Americans accepted.

Owen, however, insisted upon seeing Palmerston and was granted an interview on August 7, 1846.

This closed Owen's career as a self-appointed diplomat. Naturally, he thought his efforts had brought about the peaceful settlement, and he wrote this episode down in the list of his accomplishments.

⁵ April 1, 1846, in *Robert Owen Correspondence*, MSS, Manchester Collection.

⁶ May, 1846, *ibid.*

⁷ See letter of May 11, 1846, *ibid.*

⁸ May 13, 1846, *ibid.*

Peace was not the only object of Owen's visit to America in 1844. The old urge to convert America to the rational way of life was strong within him. Once more, as in the earlier visit twenty years before, he called on John Quincy Adams in Washington. That venerable champion of freedom, now past seventy-seven years of age but still fighting on against slavery, received Owen one morning in December of 1844.

After Owen had departed, Adams wrote in his diary that Owen was

a speculative, scheming, mischievous man. He had then succeeded in accumulating a large fortune by forming a community at Lanark, in Scotland, consisting of poor laborers, but who were said to prosper into competency and affluence and contentment, while they made his fortune. But he was ambitious of working his system upon a larger scale; and he came to this country full of the scheme of new-modelling human society. He formed an establishment in the State of Indiana, named New Harmony, and delivered discourses on the new organization of society, and trumpeted abroad his Utopia, till it fell into ruin. His establishment was left a wreck, and he went back to his own country, to practice dupery again there.⁹

It is evident that Adams did not understand what Owen had done at New Lanark. He believed it to be a communistic enterprise. But in spite of this harsh judgment of Owen, Adams consented to receive him again.

Owen came to see Adams on the morning of December 6, when he gave more of his plan to revolutionize the world. Adams wrote of this visit:

Mr. Robert Owen came again this morning, and mesmerized me for the space of an hour and a half with his lunacies about a new organization of society under the auspices of the two most powerful nations on the face of the globe—Great Britain on the Eastern and the United States on the Western Hemisphere. The materials, he says, are abundant, and the arrangements are all of simple and easy execution. He has prepared a plan in which all the details are set forth with the minutest accuracy. It is now in the hands of Mr. Pakenham, but he will ask him to return it, and will communicate it to me for my examination. It is a plan for universal education, for which the Smithsonian Fund may provide the means without interfering at all with my views. After the establishment of the system, there will be no war, and no such thing as poverty. Universal competency will be the lot of all mankind, and want will be unknown.

All this I had heard twenty-five years ago, and the humbug is too stale.¹⁰

⁹ *Memours*, XII, 116.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

Adams has an entry in his *Memoirs* that Owen called upon him in the morning of December 30. This time he brought a book for Adams to read. It was a work on community building. Owen had already given him a manifesto, which Adams described as

a farrago of confused, indefinite ideas, the only clear and distinct proposition in which is the formation of a community in or near Washington, to revolutionize the world, from a world of wretchedness and bad principles, to a world of wealth ad libitum, of peace, of plenty, and of love, without religion; to begin which considerable funds will be required, and an appropriation of not less than three millions of dollars.¹¹

There were many other visits. Owen persuaded Adams to request the House for the use of its hall, where he wanted to give lectures on his system. But Adam's motion was lost, chiefly due, he thought, to the fear of the "slave mongers" that letting the hall be used for such a purpose would set a bad precedent which might be taken advantage of by abolitionists to hold meetings in the same place. Opposition also came from the Whigs, who, according to Adams, were opposed to Owen and his projects.¹²

Owen finally brought a memorial to Adams, asking that he present it to the House. It was a request that Owen might be given an opportunity to present three lectures before the Senate and House. The first lecture was to be given in the Senate chamber and the second in the House of Representatives, but Adams did not state where Owen planned to give the third.

Adams consented to do this for Owen but balked at the suggestion that he permit his name to be attached to the request as endorsing Owen's system.

"I told him that I could not permit the introduction of my name," Adams related, "and that if I should it would of itself be fatal to his application."¹³

But in due course of time, the application was denied, as might be expected, and Owen lost another opportunity to explain his views.

Adams had pronounced Owen a humbug, but nevertheless he gave liberally of his time to Owen and sought to arrange for him a hearing before his colleagues in Congress. Perhaps Adams wrote

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹² See *ibid.*, 142.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 156.

more sharply than he felt. Indeed, his exterior was brusque and hard, but he possessed a tolerant nature that prompted him to give every man a hearing. He must have sensed in Owen a man devoted to the improvement of humanity but mistaken in the means of its attainment.

Owen on this visit to America found the disciples of Fourier in the field. As might be surmised, this utopian was not altogether to Owen's liking. He had told Adams that Fourier was but a clerk in a commercial office and unacquainted with the great world about him. But Owen was publicly more charitable and took the pains to visit Brook Farm, which had gone over to Fourier's way of life.

Marianne Dwight, writing from Brook Farm, gave a picture of Owen as he appeared to her one Sunday in May of 1845:

My dear friend,

Today I have wished for you to enjoy with us a most delightful visit from Robert Owen. Never was I so agreeably disappointed in any one. The old man has a beautiful spirit, of infinite benevolence,—I really love and reverence him. He is 74, full of energy and activity, very courteous, attends carefully to every little etiquette, pats the children on the head and has a smile and a pleasant word for all. Last evening he gave us a lecture on socialism and another today, I'm astonished at his views, to find that we differ much in speculations and in details, yet we have one and the same object, and can meet on common ground. After his lecture he gave us an account of his experiment at New Lanark which he carried on with 2000 persons for 30 years, and then left in the care of others. These people were of the very dregs of society when he took them,—now they are mentioned in statistics, as being the most moral population of Great Britain. The whole story was very interesting,—so was his account of the Rapp community. I have always associated his name with New Harmony, but he says this was conducted by people who understood not his principles, after he had finished Mr. Ripley rose and paid him a very handsome tribute, inviting him to be with us whenever he could, and expressing our sense of the honor we felt he had conferred upon us—proposed "Robert Owens," as a sentiment, wishing he might always enjoy in his own mind that sublime happiness that will one day be the portion of the human race. I wish I could see you and tell you of this interesting forenoon. He expressed himself much pleased with our experiment, and wondered at our success—is going to England, to return here in September. He has taken the commonsense path to Association.¹⁴

There were visits and lectures in New York City, where Owen was received with great acclaim by socialists. The New York *Herald*

¹⁴ May, 1845, in Marianne Dwight, *Letters from Brook Farm, 1844-1847*, pp. 94-95.

gave him more than passing notice, though it did not always take him very seriously. By 1847 Owen was back in England ready to play a part in the revolutions of the following year.

Queenwood was no longer a colony. The *New Moral World* had passed into other hands. The Society of Rational Religionists became known as the Rational Society and then disappeared as a national group. Local organizations of rational and friendly societies took its place. Militant socialism with community building as the goal died out. But Owen lived on dreaming of the millennium.

While he dreamed of the perfect society, a more practical organization came into being. The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was chartered in 1844 to carry on coöperative production and distribution for the benefit of its few members. In the same year it opened a store at Rochdale with a capital of £28 contributed by the 28 pioneer weavers.

Their early aims were very much the same as those set forth by the coöperative societies of the 'twenties. They planned on putting their unemployed members out on land or at work in their own shops; nor did they forget the educational side of the program. But most of what they planned never came to pass. The little store for the sale of provisions and clothing was the part of their list of aims that grew and grew into the vast wholesale and retail cooperative business that runs into hundreds of millions of pounds yearly.

The revolutions of 1848 gave Owen a chance—a last chance—to make his communities a reality. Still a crusader, he moved on Paris, holding meetings and distributing pamphlets. The national workshops came. For a time it looked as if a new day had dawned, but reaction set in with Napoleon III riding high and mighty.

Owen again returned to England to commune with the spirits of the great ones of the earth who had passed on before. To the living he repeated his old messages through the medium of journals and letters. At his age there could be nothing new. Over and over again this kindly old man called upon men to live rationally.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MILLENNIUM

THE PASSING of "forty-eight" marked a new day for Britain. The city streets no longer echoed to the sound of the marching Chartists. The cries of the hungry ceased; bread and cheese were to be had in plenty. Mills and factories rolled out goods for the ready markets of the world now open to Britons. Gone were the dark days of the long depression. Only the distant clash of arms on the Varna and in the Crimea disturbed the serenity of the Victorians.

"Mr. Owen of New Lanark," very far in years, sat in Cox's Hotel in London and wrote letters to Prince Albert and Napoleon III. So persistent was Owen that at length he drew a reply from Albert to the effect that henceforth he must address his communications to the head of the government—the prime minister. He spun out almost endless addresses to the high and low, later to appear in one of his journals. Owen was never long without a means to publicize his views. But in those last years he had nothing to equal the *Crisis* or the *New Moral World*. From 1850 to 1852, *Robert Owen's Journal*, "Explanatory of the Means to Well-Place, Well-Employ, and Well-Educate the Population of the World," was the vehicle used to carry along his ideas. Then came the *Rational Quarterly Review*, followed by the *New Existence of Man upon Earth* and, lastly, the *Millennial Gazette*.

There were always congresses—congresses to inaugurate the millennium. Owen's birthday, May 14, was the favorite date. In 1858 on that day, he called together the faithful to "New Form Man and New Form Society." The notice of the meeting ran thus: "Glad Tidings to the Human Race, and No Mistake This Time."

In these last years, Owen sought to come in contact with the great souls that had gone on before. Spiritualism came to be the creed of thousands in America and Europe by the middle of the century. It was not merely the recourse of elderly people in their dotage but of the young and vigorous as well. Mediums multiplied who were shrewd and plausible. They performed such marvels of table tapping and rapping as to convince their clients that they indeed had made connection with the other world.

Owen consulted an American medium by the name of Mrs. Hayden, who placed him at once in communication with President Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent, and Grace Fletcher. Grace Fletcher had been one of Owen's most devoted disciples. All of these spirits confirmed Owen in his belief that the world must be changed to a rational one to save it from destruction.

Owen told in his journal, the *Rational Quarterly Review*, how he became convinced of the truth of spiritualism:

While conversing with Mrs. Hayden, and while we were both standing before the fire talking of our mutual friends, suddenly raps were heard on a table at some distance from us, no one being near to it. I was surprised; and as the raps continued and appeared to indicate a strong desire to attract attention, I asked what was the meaning of the sounds. Mrs. Hayden said they were made by spirits anxious to communicate with some one, and she would enquire who they were. They replied to her, by the alphabet, that they were friends of mine who were desirous to communicate with me. Mrs. Hayden then gave me the alphabet and pencil, and I found, according to their own statements, that the spirits were those of my Mother and Father. I tested their truth by various questions, and their answers, all correct, surprised me exceedingly.¹

There were other demonstrations by Mrs. Hayden that left Owen thoroughly convinced. Nor was he shaken in faith when Mrs. Hayden's trick was exposed. He merely turned to other mediums for messages. It appears that the mediums supplied their clients with an alphabet and pencil and instructed them to follow the raps by running their pencil along to the proper letter in the alphabet. Naturally, when the consultant asked a question he unconsciously betrayed the answer by pausing before the appropriate letter. This gave the medium, who was watching the consultant, a clue as to what letter to rap out.

However, Owen did not let his interest in spiritualism interfere with the main purpose of his life: the attainment of a rational society. The spirits were merely invoked to lend support to this great undertaking.

As the years rolled along, Owen became more and more the venerable father to a few followers who remained. But many who did not share his economic and social ideas delighted to honor him. Among these was Karl Marx, living in London and working on

¹ I, 126 (1853).

that revolutionary book, *Das Kapital*. According to John Spargo, Owen was given a party on his eightieth birthday, "at which Marx, Liebknecht, Lessner and several of the Marx circle attended. Marx was very fond of Owen and generous in his estimate of his character and work. He admired most [of] all, perhaps, that fine devotion to truth as he understood it, and disregard of popularity, which marked Owen's life."²

In 1853 Owen's friends decided that it would be better for the aging man if he were removed from London to a place in the country. Accordingly, this was done by finding him a home at Park Farm, Sevenoaks. Attended by James Rigby, one of the old social missionaries, Owen planned great meetings and took short journeys until the end.

In 1857 the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science was organized. Owen was very much interested, but ill health made it impossible for him to attend the first meeting in Birmingham. However, he sent a number of papers, two of which were read for him.

In the fall of 1858, the association met at Liverpool. Though very weak, Owen determined to attend; and, accompanied by the faithful Rigby, he made his way to Liverpool. After a rest in bed, he arose and was dressed by Rigby, though the operation took two hours. He was then placed in a sedan chair and carried to the meeting—his last meeting.

Holyoake, Owen's friend, describes what took place at the meeting and after:

Four policemen bore him to the platform. It is now a matter of public history, how kindly Lord Brougham, as soon as he saw his old friend, took him by the arm, led him forward, and obtained a hearing for him. Then Mr. Owen, in his grand manner, proclaimed his ancient message of science, competence, and good will to the world. When he came to the conclusion of his first period, Lord Brougham, out of regard for his failing strength, terminated it. He clapped his hands, applauded his words, then said, "Capital, very good, can't be better, Mr. Owen! There, that will do." Then in an undertone. "Here, Rigby, convey the old gentleman to his bed." He was carried back. As soon as he reached his bed he became unconscious. An hour after he revived.

"Rigby, Rigby," he called.

"Yes, Sir—here I am"

"How did I speak? What did I say?"

² John Spargo, *Karl Marx*, p. 190.

"O, very well, Sir. I have taken down your words."

"Very good, read them to me. Ah, that will do. Very important, very important."

For two weeks he kept his bed at the Victoria Hotel. Mr. Rathbone frequently called to inquire after Mr. Owen's health. Mr. Brown, M. P., and many gentlemen, paid him a similar complement. One morning he exclaimed, "Rigby, pack up, we'll go."

"Go where, Sir—to London?"

"Go to my native place. I will lay my bones whence I derived them."

Dressings, delays, and carryings brought him to the river. He was conveyed over. He took the rail to Shrewsbury. Thence a carriage to travel thirty miles into Wales. When he came to the border line which separates England from Wales he knew it again. It was more than seventy years since he passed over it. He raised himself up in his carriage, and gave a cheer. He was on his own native land once more. It was the last cheer the old man ever gave. He wanted to persuade Mr. Rigby that he must be sensible of the difference of the atmosphere. With brightened eyes the aged wanderer looked around. The old mountains stood there in their ancient grandeur. The grand old trees, under whose shadow he passed in his youth, waved their branches in welcome. What scenes had the wanderer passed through since last he gazed upon them! Manufacturing days, crowning success, philanthropic experiments, public meetings at the London Tavern, Continental travel, interviews with kings, Mississippi Valleys, Indiana forests, journeys, labours, agitations, honours, calumnies, hopes, and never ceasing toil, what world, what an age had intervened since last he passed his native border.

When he reached a beautiful estate he had known in his earlier days, he said, "Rigby we will drive up to the gates, and you ask if Dr. Johns is at home." The astonished domestic answered, "Why, Dr. Johns has been dead twenty years." "Once a man and twice a child," was true of Mr. Owen. His early life had come over him like a flood. He was in the dreamland of his early days. "Dead twenty years," recalled him to the consciousness that death had gone before him and reaped the field of his youthful memories. Learning that the lady of the house was a daughter of Dr. Johns, he said, "Rigby, go and say that Robert Owen is at the gate." She no sooner heard that unexpected name, than she came out to the carriage door, and with a woman's quickness saw how it was with the ancient friend of her father. She had him conveyed into her house and placed by the fire. "Now, Mr. Owen," she said, "You are once more in your own country, among old habits and customs, what shall I get for you?" His answer showed how deeply his childhood days had come back to him. "Make me some flummery"—wheat and milk; the diet of his father's table. He partook of it. He hardly ever ate afterwards.

His visit to Newtown was one of curiosity. He arranged to call Mr. Rigby Mr. Friday, and himself Mr. Oliver, and had themselves so reported at the Bears Head Hotel. When he was able to go out, he had his carriage stopped two doors below, at the house of his birth, and sent in Mr. Rigby to buy two quires of the best note paper, and ask if that was the house in which Mr. Owen was born. It soon appeared that that fact was known and respected,

and Mr. David Thomas, the occupant, showed Mr. Rigby the room in which Mr. Owen's birth occurred. Suspecting the truth, he asked Mr. Rigby if the old gentleman in the carriage could be Mr. Owen. Mr. Rigby, who had no orders to own it, and too little diplomatic skill to parry a question in which he was so much interested, neither answered no nor yes, but something between the two, and Mr. Thomas believed what he was not told. On Mr. Thomas delivery of the note paper at the carriage window, Mr. Owen, without speaking, took his hand and shook it warmly twice, and ordered his carriage to be driven back to Shrewsbury, and thence to Liverpool he went by railway. Unless for the pleasure of seeing the old country again by passing through it, and re-appearing in Newtown as a visitor in his own proper name, one knows not the purpose of this journey. Mr. Owen had sent a letter to Mr. David Thomas, of Newtown, saying that provided a public meeting could be convened by the principal inhabitants, he should be happy to proclaim an important message to the people, be the guest of Mr. Thomas, and sleep once more in the house of his birth. The ruling passion was strong in death. When he reached Shrewsbury on his return, he went to the Lion Hotel, and took to his bed again. From thence, by request, he was carried to his carriage, and once more retraced his steps to Newtown. He dwelt by the way upon all the early scenes of his youth, and pointed out to Mr. Rigby various objects of interest to him. He entered Newtown now in his own way, and in his own name. Though he had promised Mr. Thomas to be his guest, he would not present himself at his house until he was recovered—it being contrary to his ideas of courtesy. He took up his residence at the Bears Head Hotel, two doors from his birth-place. He slept in room No. 3; and died in room No. 14. He now desired Mr. Rigby to return to London, and send down Mr. Dale Owen, and he remained alone at the Bear's Head. Mr. Lewis a bookseller in Newtown, rendered him attentions during several days, which Mr. Owen valued highly, and Mr. Thomas was assiduous in kind offices to him. During a week he took only sugar and water. Dr. Slyman of Newtown Hall was his medical attendant. Mr. Owen, though never an abstainer from wine, was most temperate in his habits; and though most essential to him in his exhausted state, declined to take stimulants now. Dr. Slyman considers that he might have recovered. Climatic disease, bronchitis being an accompaniment, is the explanation Dr. Slyman gave me of the immediate cause of his death. Two or three days before his death Mr. D. Thomas asked Mr. Owen (the Rector having called) whether he should invite him up, and whether he should read to him from the Bible and make some exhortation. Mr. Owen turned his head and said in his commanding way, No, No. . . ."³

The last day dawned. It was the day Robert Owen had planned for a public meeting to reform the educational system of Newtown. A numerous and respectable audience of the best citizens would be there ready for his message. But the great propagandist was

³ George Jacob Holyoake, *Life and Last Days of Robert Owen*, pp. 7-9.

dying. He had called his last meeting to fight against an irrational world.

Meantime, Rigby had gone to London in order to bring Robert Dale Owen, who was at this time American minister to Naples. The eldest son arrived at Newtown on the same day that his father had made the call for a public meeting.

That night he sank rapidly. Holyoake wrote how Owen called out to ask for the time at 1:30 A.M. An attendant answered that it was 1:30 A.M.; but Owen, his hearing being weak, thought the attendant said 2:30. An hour later Owen again inquired the time and was answered that it was half past two. Another hour passed, and once more the dying man asked the time. Being told it was half past three, he replied in his usual gentle, smiling manner, "Why, it has been half-past two these three hours."⁴

The end came a few hours later as described by his son:

It is all over. My dear father passed away this morning, at a quarter before seven, and passed away as gently and quietly as if he had been falling asleep. There was not the least struggle, not a contraction of a limb, or a muscle, not an expression of pain on his face. His breathing gradually became slower and slower, until at last it ceased so imperceptibly that, even as I held his hand, I could scarcely tell the moment when he no longer breathed. His last words, distinctly pronounced about twenty minutes before his death, were "Relief has come." About half-an-hour before, he said, "Very easy and comfortable."⁵

They buried him in consecrated ground in the old churchyard next to the grave of his parents. It was his wish.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵ Letter of Robert Dale Owen to George Jacob Holyoake, November 17, 1858, in Holyoake, *Life and Last Days of Robert Owen*, p. 10

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